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**Horizon**

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**REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART**

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EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

Vol. IX No. 49 January 1944

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# COMMENT

As we start a New Year, HORIZON would like to address a few words to our contributors and would-be contributors. A magazine is so dependent on a few regular contributors, especially in wartime, that it is always in danger of getting into a groove, and when this is the case, when its arteries begin to harden, only the contributors can provide the remedy. Therefore we ask them this year to help us to vary our make-up. Critical articles for instance, tend to be predominantly French. This is not because HORIZON is pro-French, but because, at a time when France is inaccessible, so many critics are fascinated by French literature. We would ask our prospective critics and essayists, for a change, to concentrate on English writers, particularly on English and American writers of the nineteenth century. We need a good essay on Stendhal and we are interested in living and not too well-known French writers like Sartre, Giono, Malraux, but otherwise we are full up.

War-writers are disappointing, either because they submit too bare a reportage or derivative *pastiches* of Hemingway. We want above all, well-written, adult, thoughtful war-pictures with a colouring of emotion. Will some of those who have been over Berlin please send in a serious account of their feelings and experiences, and any soldiers who have taken part in landings?

Short-story writers stand more chance if there is some unusual content in their stories—either an unusual background or treatment or point of view. HORIZON will always publish stories of pure realism, but we take the line that experiences connected with the blitz, the shopping queues, the home front, deserted wives, deceived husbands, broken homes, dull jobs, bad schools, group squabbles, are so much a picture of our ordinary lives that unless the workmanship is outstanding we are prejudiced against them.

To poets we would say that the mere thinking aloud on a typewriter does not constitute poetry, that we are looking for what is vivid, fresh and perfectly expressed, not for chunks of poetical mood which do not crystallize into poems and leave behind only an impression of resentment, bewilderment, or self-pity.

To writers on general subjects we would say that HORIZON is



Y. (Gravely) I'm afraid so. . . .

Or—

He: Mary . . . d'you remember . . . Vienna. . . .

She: (Emotional) It's no good, Francis!

He: Mary . . . the music . . . the gypsies. . . .

She: (Her eyes full of tears) The Danube in spring. . . .

He: (Laughing) Yes . . . and you remember that funny old band leader with the great red whiskers who tried to play 'Dance Little Lady' for you and it sounded like Chopin's Funeral March. . . .

(They both laugh. Then she looks at him, sadly).

She: I'd quite made up my mind to be angry with you, Francis. . . .

He: Darling . . . have a tomato. . . .

She: (Smiling through tears) Francis . . . you child. . . .

And so on. This sort of thing has reached such a pitch that if a new play of a certain kind is heralded in London, with a certain cast in it, we know in advance the clothes that will be worn, the kind of lines that will be thrown away, the attitudes that will be struck, and the make of the interminable cigarettes that will be smoked. There is no feeling of novelty at all, no electricity in the house on the first night. Let us imagine what happens. The house is full. The curtain goes up while some members of the audience are out of their seats, gossiping, waving to each other, being seen. To cover the shuffling, there is a lengthy duologue between two servants in a luxurious room belonging to obviously successful and worthless people, and exquisitely furnished with extreme lack of taste. The servants establish everything. Time, place, location of guest room, fact that master is a flirt, fact that mistress knows it, fact that master is a playwright (here we guess that he will make his entrance in a dressing gown), fact that mistress is an actress, fact that this particular play is one of it's author's most typical, and will therefore take nobody by surprise, thank God! The tedium continues for some time, and the audience is obviously enjoying itself. Then, at exactly the right moment, the moment the experienced playgoer had expected, the actor-in-chief makes his entrance, in a dressing gown. Tumultuous applause. He's so easily recognizable!

By the end of the first act, the audience can guess the trend of the other two acts, and comes back after the interval happy in th



knowledge that it will not be taken by surprise under any circumstances, and that it's theatrical sense has been flattered. It can sit back, and refrain from thinking. The evening will go according to plan. The play is a success by virtue of its veneer, it's lack of originality, and it's well-known profile.

Tragic indeed, because the real actors are often there, playing either the comic policeman *deus-ex-machina* who winds everything up in the last ten minutes, or the caricatured harridan who 'does' for the master, and speaks stage cockney—perhaps the great King Lear is there, in tails, patting the cushions as the first-nighters find their seats, talking to the great aproned Lady Macbeth about Master's this and Mistress' that:

But that is not the worst of it. Let us say that by some strange fluke the great King Lear is discovered, and given his chance. He straightway runs into another difficulty. If an actor disappears too often into the heart and soul of the character he plays—if that process necessitates the abundant use of crêpe-hair, of noses and beards, and of integrity, he runs a grave risk of being neglected. If, however, he can let some obvious clue to his identity penetrate his disguise, the performance is generally considered remarkable. A man like Mr. Laughton, for instance, must take good care that his disguises are penetrated. He, of course, has little difficulty. He has now a reputation as an outstanding character actor. Apparently Captain Bligh, the Hunchback of Notre Dame, and Squire Pengallan all look alike, all think alike, all act alike, and I suspect would all speak the Gettysburg Address rather beautifully if asked to. Meanwhile an actor like, say, Mr. Stephen Murray, is foolish enough to maintain that Thersites and Abraham Lincoln are not even distant relations. Oh, what a risk he is running!

We have seen how the work of the brilliant often goes unappreciated. There is yet another evil. The influence of mediocre texts on ordinary actors. When the play is bad, the average modern actor all too rarely tries to lift the thing out of the commonplace rut—which is bad for two distinct reasons. Firstly, it makes the play as boring and stereotyped as when he read it. Secondly, the poison of indifference and complacency works on him, so that when he is presented with a really sensitive, and therefore difficult text, he has forgotten how to go about it, and plunges into every pitfall, ignoring the punctuation, and finding himself unable to create any atmosphere behind the lines. Too many actors keep an

inventory of their capabilities stored in their minds, and to them a colonel is just a colonel, a clergyman is just a clergyman. How dull! The theatre is, after all, hard as it is to believe, an art. All the joy, all the mystery associated with an art vanishes immediately it is degraded to a routine, a plain functional job of work.

And here we come to the guilt of the critics. Why are the plays of one of the greatest contemporary dramatists writing in the English language never to be seen in London? Probably because that great dramatist can foresee what would happen. I refer, of course, to Mr. Sean O'Casey, an angry dramatic poet, whose plays are full of the most shocking surprises enacted before dingy crumbling walls, horribly devoid of clappable entrances and exits. He will never be popular in this day and age, but he will outlive us all. Why is he so great? Are his recent plays perfect? I personally don't think so. Are his plots admirable, his construction beyond praise? I wouldn't know. He is great simply because he is the only dramatist in England who consistently dares to bite off more than he can chew. And there is a certain glory in that. Shakespeare, one feels, would want his plays judged alongside perfection itself. He reached for the stars, and failed more magnificently than anyone else. With O'Casey it is the same. His work is full of continual striving after moods too large to express. He too, would wish for perfection. He too, will fail, obviously. Mr. Somerset Maugham has often achieved what he set out to do. Shakespeare and O'Casey, never. 'The Circle' is, in it's way, a perfect play. 'King Lear' is not. Yet nobody doubts which is the greater of the two.

It is the spirit of enterprise which has deserted our playwrights. They are too concerned with rules and regulations. No artist of any kind can achieve anything really worth while within the limits imposed by the theorists. Very few of our writers throw caution to the winds. It is less lucrative.

Mr. O'Casey is not one for the theorists. The theorists, the critics, would not subscribe to his violent assaults on the Dramatic Muse. Bite off more than you can chew, try something new, and you lay yourself open to their wise scolding. A foolish few have learned this to their cost.

Of course, the critic's function is not always a pleasant one. In a far from golden age in the theatre, it must be incredibly boring—but that is no excuse. I met a critic the other day at some



theatrical function, a perfectly charming gentleman, who was pleased to describe himself as one of the most experienced critics in London. Speaking about Mr. Maxwell Anderson's 'The Wingless Victory', he accused it, quite rightly, of being just an old-fashioned melodrama. I was impressed, and approved of him as a critic. Then, a little later on, he rose to his feet, and made an impassioned plea for more melodrama in the theatre of today—'Why don't our young authors write more melodrama?' He said—'The most splendid moment I have ever experienced in the theatre was during Henry Arthur Jones' 'Silver King' . . . while the immortal line "O God, put back Thy universe and give me yesterday" was being uttered.' He also chided me mildly for saying that the theatre was in a bad state, claiming that everything in the garden was rosy. Replying to his demand for more melodrama, I claimed that it was impossible nowadays to emulate that kind of play unselfconsciously, unless it was to be codded, but that if he insisted on an example along the lines that he had indicated, surely Doctor Faustus' last speech—

'See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!

One drop would save my soul—half a drop: ah, my Christ!'—which was in the same vein as the Jones' one, was more worth copying. It transcended melodrama because of its power and its poetry, I said, rather rashly. And he was seen to nod furiously. In other words, he seemed to agree with absolutely everything anybody said. One's knife passed through him time and again, and he always emerged smiling, ever so nice, ever so keen on everything, trees, birds, cross-word puzzles, ice-cream, China tea, drama. Naturally, they are not all like that, but this incident, which I hope will prove an isolated one, shook me. I believe that violent, biased critics are better for the theatre than ones who see perfection everywhere.

But what critics have we? There is Mr. Agate, who loves the theatre, and is always well worth reading, There is Mr. Farjeon, who ought to have more space at his disposal. There is Mr. Dent, Mr. Macarthy, Mr. Horsnell, Mr. Brown and a few others. And after that we come across those writers who are not critics at all, but reporters. Their function should be made quite clear, so that their criticism need not be taken seriously. It would be better that way, because when they do attempt criticism, they often

meet with disastrous, self-revealing results. One of these people found 'Uncle Vanya' irritating. 'It isn't made clear if it's a tragedy or a comedy', he grumbled. Well, really!

What is depressing about the criticism of today is not only that new, adventurous plays, like Mr. Ackland's, are treated far too harshly, but also that such a great deal of bilge is given the critic's blessing.

How is this state of affairs to change? I don't think that it's worth the author's or the actor's while to plead with the critics, or to bluster, or to fawn. Only one man in the theatre seems to get any kick out of behaviour of this kind, and that is Mr. Beverley Baxter, who, both as author and critic, has made this side of theatre life peculiarly his own.

No, let us just wake up. Miss Sheila Donisthorpe, in her book 'Show Business' is full of good, if slightly impracticable ideas. She is also full of bitterness. This should not be so. Bitterness has driven some of our best dramatists from the stage, and it is the authors who set the pace. Let the authors persevere, write more and better plays, and they will slowly but surely improve the standard of acting, make the men with the money more adventurous, educate the audience to the great thrills of the theatre, and even, with luck, improve the standard of criticism.

Complacent wishful-thinkers in the theatre attribute the present decay to the war. They believe that all our best theatrical artists are either in the war, or lying in the dark and listening, either being beastly or not being beastly to the Germans. They believe that all people want to do is to laugh. I suppose that is why 'Watch on the Rhine' and 'Lottie Dundass' are so successful. It is an easy thing to say, and a difficult thing to prove.

The theatre is what we make it. Let us make it good. Please, Mr. Bridie, Mr. Ackland, Mr. Priestley, Miss McCracken, Miss Donisthorpe. . . .

It is a task fraught with difficulties, but there is one great consolation. Things are so bad at present that it will need a stroke of diabolical genius to make them worse.



## ANTONY BOURNE

# WHERE SHALL JOHN GO?

### III—U.S.A.

DEAR JOHN,

It would, I suppose be wise to tell you, before we go any farther, my qualifications, or rather lack of them, as an informant on America. The first 6 years of my life were spent in New York City or thereabouts, and though those years must have made deep scores on my subconscious, they left my conscious mind remarkably untouched. I recall myself dressed for the first time in a white fur coat, sitting unwarily on a fly-paper; some rather bold experiments in sex, and sans front teeth playing the wolf in 'Little Red Riding Hood'. The rest is oblivion. During the next twenty years, I became, or like to think I did, a European.

On my return to America I spent a few months in New York, a few more in Southern California, and what seems like a lifetime in various Army camps scattered over the country, in locations remarkable only for their inaccessibility. Moreover I spent a considerable part of this brief time mooning about in a little private bubble blown from my European experiences, which refracted every glimmer of understanding of the country into a succession of absolutely invalid European comparisons, so that it was not until it was rather too late that I discovered that I was revisiting a country as different from England in particular and Europe in general as Aztec Mexico.

Although I have peered through the window of a Pullman car or an automobile at most of the natural wonders and horrors of the landscape, and visited a number of the more notorious beauty spots, I'm afraid I came away without the conventional impressions of Nature unconquered, of infinite space, or of overwhelming beauty; my reaction to everything not urban has been either one of acute melancholy or an urgent *nostalgie du pavé*. For this I don't particularly apologize, for the only important discovery to be made about the natural scene is, I believe, its unimportance; its only appeal, the sadness of a lost cause. Everywhere, always, you sense the threat of what might be called the Cube-Ice Age. Even in parts of the country undiscovered by

or unattractive to the tourist, where the Refrigerator, Coca-Cola, or the Tea Shoppee are not in evidence, even in places which in other countries by their very vastness or strangeness would impress, you cannot escape from the suggestion of imminent human subjection. The desert, you are sure, can be turned, at a moment's notice, into a luxuriant vegetable garden, by the intensely commonplace miracle of sprinkling chemicals, or diverting a river, while the Dust Bowl will probably be restored tomorrow by someone inventing a wind-machine to blow the dust right back again. In the recognized beauty spots, the Blue Hills of Virginia, the Painted Desert, Death Valley, the Grand Canyon, all magnificent, glorious, tremendous, everything the brochure calls them, you cannot escape the automobile and the refined roadhouse and the organized fun. In the national parks the bears eat mother's home-baked cookies, gingerly handed through the half-opened car-window, and only occasionally succeed in asserting themselves with a well-merited and stunning pat. America belongs to its settlers in a very complete sense.

For the sake of argument, I presume you would settle, if you emigrated, either in New York, or in the vicinity of Los Angeles. Most European emigrés have chosen one or the other, if for no other reason than that there are other Europeans there. I can picture you in Anglicized Boston, in fake-French New Orleans even, but not in Kansas City, Cleveland, or St. Paul, all admirable from their own particular point of view, even culturally well equipped, but not, I feel, your kind of life. Dinner at six, the football game on Saturday afternoon, the Elk's convention, and the Mayflower Society reunion . . . you would have to have been brought up in it to like it. Therefore I shall confine myself to giving you a few impressions of New York and Los Angeles and telling you a little about one or two of your friends who are living in one or the other.

You already know something of New York. The excitement and stimulation of its defiant architecture and exhilarating climate you are certainly familiar with, but probably you are unaware of the hangover derived from over-indulgence in it, and of the actual physical as well as of the spiritual difficulties of living the kind of life you like there. It is, I think, the most urban city in the world, a complete negation of its surroundings . . . few trees, the most artificial of parks, tall austere and poker-faced like



the traditional diplomat. However, I doubt if it is in itself any more essentially unfriendly or mentally stultifying than any other big city, and it is only to the pattern of its social life that I take exception. To begin with it is the most expensive place in the world to live... I can see no charm attached to living in Greenwich Village, where most intellectuals collect, not, I suspect, through any real love of the place, but because, owing to its inaccessibility and shabbiness it is cheap, and moreover lends itself more readily (though not nearly readily enough) than most of the rest of the city, to an imitation Boulevard Raspail atmosphere.

How and where exactly to live I find it rather hard to tell you. In the more attractive sections of the town you are presented with the choice of a number of almost exactly similar boxes, the price increasing in direct proportion to the measurements. You are at liberty to assert your taste and personality by choosing to have your kitchen in the bathroom or in the living-room. You can then proceed to furnish (a process usually delegated by the prescient New Yorker to a decorator, a luxury you will be quite unable to afford), and so you are at liberty to exhaust yourself in the antique shops on Third Avenue or on Tenth Street, returning penniless with just enough furniture to live on. Meanwhile remember that unless you move promptly, on October 1st next, to another exactly similar box, you will be considered hopelessly stuck-in-the-mud, and moreover lose half your acquaintances owing to their inability to believe that you are still living in the same spot. Once settled in your flat I presume you would like to entertain, but remember that it is practically impossible to keep a servant on any reasonable sort of income. If by any financial wizardry or personal charm you are able to persuade a domestic into your flat, you will usually find her social life far more active than, and by no means to be interfered with by yours, and her working day quite firmly over by seven, so that unless you can persuade your guests to dine at six, you will spend the evening in the kitchen. Of course you can get most wonderful food in certain restaurants, but I don't think you will ever find it conducive to the kind of conversation that you enjoy to entertain in those elegant, exorbitantly expensive places, quivering in anticipation of the bill. As for being entertained, if it is winter all your rich friends will have gone south, and if it is summer they will all have gone north, so that the open season is

somewhat limited. Of course you have available, in compensation, the very best of opera and concerts, magnificent paintings, and excellent theatres, but in a little while, when you have heard and seen most of what you want, and are growing tired of playing with the plumbing, you will pine for London and a Sense of the Past.

Perhaps you would like to hear a little about Auden who, as you would expect, succeeded in finding his own unique form of life in New York; he is, I believe, the only European intellectual not to have been noticeably injured by transplantation. His intellectual survival, I think, he owes to the complete opaqueness of the particular personal bubble, to use a previous metaphor, in which he travels . . . his world is so private and so completely subconsciously motivated that I think he would be equally at home in London, New York or in an igloo, as long as there was someone to teach. When I saw him some three years ago he was living in a rather stately 1860-ish house in Brooklyn, run by George (Opening Of a Door) Davis with a view, I imagine, to harbouring intellectuals, and quite charmingly unfurnished. The drawing-room, as far as I can remember, contained a piano and a packing case. Among the guests and frequent visitors at the time were Carson McCullers, Louis MacNeice, Benjamin Britten, and Gipsy Rose Lee, then in the throes of her first literary adventure. The life of the boarders was very unconnected, converging only at dinner time, usually, owing to Miss McCullers' emotional instability, a highly dramatic meal. Auden, who seemed completely in his element, was lecturing at the New School and also writing very hard in his large garret at the top of the house. For relaxation, once a week, he would dress elaborately in a dinner jacket, plaster down his hair, and set off in the subway to the Opera. Later he went off to teach at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor but did not find the Mid-West particularly congenial, and is now teaching at Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, which is, I believe, an advanced private school for boys. Whether he is particularly happy I am in no position to say, but certainly the quality of his work has in no way fallen off since his emigration, and moreover apart from a long flirtation with the Catholic Church, he has avoided the capitulation to mysticism, which would be the first symptom of defeat. His survival is, however, unique, explicable by the particularly private quality of his talent, and don't let it mislead anyone an atom less introverted than he.



I think I have probably sufficiently discouraged you about New York, and by this time you will want to see something of Southern California. If you arrive by train your first impressions will be of row upon row of orange trees laid out in rigid pattern on a wide flat plain. As you approach the coast, the distant mountains gradually converge and the increased incidence of white frame houses, gas stations, drive-ins and bill-boards displaying their larger- and lovelier-than-life-consumers of Coca-Cola, Camels, or Budweiser Beer announce the proximity of the city. By the time you reach the station your impression will still be clouded in oranges, but the station itself will give you a sharp push into the unrealities of the film city, a hint of what is in store . . . it is a vast hacienda, inside all marble and mosaic, outside the ultimate in pseudo-Spanish . . . the link between the preconceptions and the actualities of the place.

To journey in by car would break the shock a little less gently. The outskirts announce themselves by degrees, an occasional formless lump of frame and stucco houses, suddenly an endless main street expanding sideways into nothing . . . Azusa, Glendora, the name makes little difference; every main street has its Piggly Wiggly stores, its Wonder Super Market, its Super Wonder Market, and oranges, oranges, oranges, for sale by the glass, by the box, by the orchard. Soon the pattern becomes more confused, the house clumps are fused by drive-ins, by street-car lines which start off with a determined double track and wander off into nowhere . . . telegraph poles rush tipsily off in all directions. Suddenly you enter a broad four-lane highway; no houses within sight, a wonderfully planned entrance into what must be a wonderfully planned city, you plunge over a viaduct, through a long tunnel and all at once you are in Bedlam, among a holocaust of hooting automobiles, clanking street-cars and people hurling themselves in mass suicide attempts in front of every vehicle; you are in the horizontal Babel, the city of Los Angeles.

Let me explain that Hollywood, a name usually applied abroad to express the film capital, is nothing more than a suburb of this city, and a rather shabby one at that. The stars who once lived there have long ago moved away, and the studios have migrated to roomier locations; however, the term Hollywood has still a perfectly valid application to the city of Los Angeles and its environs, for it expresses the deep imprint of the film industry on the city.

The first impression is of sunshine, hard and brilliant like a spotlight, seldom uncomfortably hot, but enveloping everything, and rather cruel to the architecture. The residential districts are a nightmare of jumbled styles, neo-Spanish, colonial Georgian, chateau, a moorish mosque placed next to a Chinese pagoda, all constructed in such a way as to look shabby the moment they have been built, the whole thing suggestive of the stage properties of a second-rate touring company. The city rambles aimlessly, uncertain where to stop, over the landscape, down to the sea, up into the hills, leaving great empty untidy spaces ready for yet another block of French chateau apartments which someone failed to build because the city moved too fast.

The inhabitants contribute little to stabilizing the picture. The streets near the studio are full of extras in every conceivable type of fancy dress, and as though to vie with them the rest of the population wear costumes equally outlandish: middle-aged women in pyjamas and a short fur jacket bouncing through the streets on high-heeled shoes; men in modified zoot-suits, cowboys in their fancy boots, Okies, Arkies, thousands of people looking for jobs, looking for film stars, hunting for an autograph, or some other tangible evidence of their dream world. Even the landscape is unreal, impermanent, and dead. In the violent rainstorms of the winter season the hills quite visibly erode as they dissolve, bringing with them trees and houses: nothing lasts: in twenty years it will be quite another picture.

No wonder that such an unstable background provides the world's most prolific breeding-ground for the metaphysical. Strange cults of every variety flourish in the equable climate, and the more orthodox religions take on a new lease of life. Every Saturday half a page of advertisement in the daily Press exhorts Angelinos, by various methods, to live up to their names, an exhortation to which they most nobly respond; Aimee Semple MacPherson's Four Square Gospel and the Ballard's 'Great I AM' movement, both rooted in Los Angeles, have assumed gigantic proportions and achieved wide notoriety. Delicate whimsy has touched other aspects of religion, allowing the quick to attend services in the 'Wee Kirk O' The Heather', and the dead, sealed in urns, to lie in 'Forest Lawn' the world's most tasteful and discreet burying ground, entertained (presumably until the resurrection) by mechanical organ music.

The balmy climate and the feeling of unreality and impermanence generated by the surroundings undoubtedly contribute to the local penchant for mysticism, but how far they have influenced the metaphysical development of your friends Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood and Gerald Heard, all of whom are now living, at least physically, in this part of the world, it would be hard to judge. As you know Christopher Isherwood was the only one of the three who, before his emigration, showed no visible predisposition to embark on metaphysical experiment. Huxley has long been exploring Eastern religious philosophy and attempting to reconcile its doctrines with Western *mœurs*, while Heard has been playing Cassandra for years, both in print and in private, in slightly varying guises. One thing is certain, however, that California brought them, philosophically speaking, into closer co-operation than would have been possible elsewhere. When I first arrived in California some three years ago, Heard had assumed an apparently unwilling leadership of a select group of emigrés and others, a position forced on him by the publication of *Pain, Sex and Time*. A sketchy outline of his argument is something like this: the natural evolutionary process has run down, and as mankind must progress or perish, and as it doesn't seem to be getting any outside help it must take the process in hand itself. Further physical evolution is both unlikely and unnecessary, and man must therefore evolve mentally with his own conscious co-operation. The vast stores of vital energy uselessly dissipated by the human race in its entirely disproportionate capacity for pain and for sexual activity could be harnessed by conscious effort to the evolutionary process which should yield some startling results in increasing our consciousness. The method recommended to achieve this is based on Raja Yoga (not to be confused with the more vulgar forms of Yoga practised by the Fakirs). By contemplation and self-control accompanied by a few mild physical exercises, he claims that one's relationship to reality will become clearer, and that fortified by one's knowledge of 'what' is really 'what' one will be capable of unimaginable feats. The argument, as Mr. Heard ably puts it, has a definite appeal to the active mind in search of an acceptable religious creed. It provides intellectual activity accompanied by concrete results (long periods of contemplative concentration do produce certain peculiar mental experiences, explained according to one's



belief, as either metaphysical revelations or autohypnotic hallucinations), and for the mind with a political turn could even promise a new order with a mystical élite a few steps ahead, in increased consciousness, of the mass which had not kept up on their contemplation.

The Hollywood headquarters of the Yoga cult is a small mosque-like building not far from Hollywood Boulevard. This temple is nonchalantly disposed in a row of residential dwellings and might well be taken for a not unusually extravagant flight in home-building. The interior is a plain, white, rectangular room with a small altar, a pulpit, an Oriental rug and a sort of gong, which is soundly beaten at the beginning of a service accompanied by cries from the presiding Swami of 'OM' 'OM' intended to put the soul at ease. The Swami is an emissary from an Indian Yogi training college whose command of the English language left something to be desired, and who did little, to my mind, to clear up the confusion between Eastern and Western thought processes. Luckily, about this time, it was possible, owing to the indisposition of the Swami, for Mr. Heard to step into the pulpit and straighten things out in no uncertain terms. Mr. Heard is an eloquent speaker and gives the impression of reciting, with remarkable strength and vigour, a beautifully measured prose passage which he has just completed and which has resulted in a condition of complete self-hypnosis. The fire and brimstone content of his addresses, delivered in this manner, had a most startling effect, rather similar one imagines to a Spanish priest threatening his erring flock with a very nasty time in purgatory. Either you contemplate, he says, deny the self, and come to better terms with reality or you are going to get a very raw deal on your next appearance. The whole human race is, he maintains, in such a parlous condition that unless a whole number of people hurry up about increasing their consciousness and provide a sort of mystic élite, then it won't be long before the race, mechanically equipped as it is now, will destroy itself.

At this time Christopher Isherwood also spoke in the Temple, in a slightly more tolerant vein, and the place became quite a major Hollywood attraction. This halcyon period did not last, however, and possibly because the Swami was nervous of having all his thunder stolen, Heard ceased to speak at the Temple, and devoted most of his time to building a monastery or rather

retreat for contemplatives in the hills some distance down the coast from Los Angeles. This building was completed just before I left, and very lovely it was, too, but so far I have heard of none of the projected seminars being held there, and I got the impression that there was a marked decline in interest on the part of both Heard and Isherwood in the whole project.

Isherwood is now living with the Swami in a little house near the Temple, translating the Upanishads (?) via the Swami's somewhat basic English into readable prose. This is as far as I know his only literary activity. His film work has suffered owing to his refusal to write anything that smacks of propaganda, and during the past two years he has only consented to work on one film, Maugham's *Before the Dawn*, in which he wrote the scene depicting the trial of the conscientious objector. His life is largely spent in religious pursuits and exercises, he spends long hours at contemplation, is a vegetarian, doesn't smoke and doesn't drink; his social life is slightly limited as a result, and he sees very few people indeed. Since going to live with the Swami he seems to have committed himself entirely to the contemplative life, and it seems safe to say that the 'Mr. Norris' Isherwood has gone for good. While admiring the intellectual honesty which compelled him to commit himself so wholeheartedly to his experiment, it is impossible not to regret the disappearance of such a talented novelist, for it is very doubtful if anything in his new life will afford an opportunity for his malicious gift, unless of course he completely abandons it, in which case he and the reading public should have a field-day.

Heard is living at Laguna, near, but not in his mountain retreat, and is writing detective stories in between contemplating and dispensing spiritual advice to his devotees, a pursuit of which he is not particularly fond owing to the fact that they are inclined to have a personal problem or a poem up their sleeves. He has a considerable Messianic reputation and people have come from all over the country only to find that he is none too keen to shoulder their responsibilities as he does not consider himself sufficiently advanced to be able to give sound advice. He has drawn more and more away from the Swami, and nearer to the Quakers, and with Isherwood living in the Temple, and Huxley in his remote house in the Mojave desert, the mystic Axis presents no united front to the public. Of course, any

schism is nothing but mildly doctrinaire, and they have all three announced in public—Huxley most recently in *Grey Eminence*, Heard in *Pain, Sex and Time*, and Isherwood by retiring to the Swami's home—their adherence to the same general principles. The effect of this joint declaration by three such renowned intellectuals is bound to be far-reaching. However, though Huxley seems able to do perfectly well in this field, and entertain the public at the same time—*Grey Eminence* was a great success in the United States—it is impossible not to regret the loss of Isherwood's original type of work in exchange for his magazine *Vedanta of the West*!

I have already suggested that the climate and the general unreality of the natural surroundings may have had something to do with at least Isherwood's development. I doubt whether I have in the least succeeded in convincing you and can only say that I am sure that combined with the difficulties of transplantation they have certainly made a contribution. Such down-to-earth realist writers as Dodie Smith and John Van Druten have been slightly touched by Heard and I cannot believe that it is pure chance that he has found his following amongst the English in Hollywood.

I don't know whether there is any real object lesson to be drawn from this as to what advise to give you about living in America, but I do think that the English intellectual should think at least twice before transplanting himself. The position of the intellectual in American society is so completely different to his status in England. There is, in fact, none of the patronage which, while nowadays it doesn't usually provide a very satisfactory livelihood, allows him, even though he is not particularly productive or successful, a very definite position in society, a traditional place at the dinner-table and a bed in the spare room. The American attitude, a far more realistic one, simply implies that if you are so damned clever, you ought to do something about it, and be able to make a good living for yourself. For the productive, already established writer, the rewards are far greater than in England, but the films or the weekly column are practically bound to get him, a fate which in America seems fatal to the delicately nurtured English talent. I can only come to the conclusion that while I thoroughly recommend immediate emigration to the extrovert, the young



who are going into business, the ambitious, and the hardy, for you John, and for other writers whose background is definitely English is the probability that you would find your roots wither or your talent sprouting strange and not altogether desirable branches.

## SIDNEY JANIS

# CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PRIMITIVE PAINTING

No newcomer to American art is the primitive painter. He has persisted for generations, excellent works by him dating back to 1670. While never academically trained, he often painted as an extension of his craft, generally one that was the trade by which he earned a living. Art was neither hobby nor ideal but a way of raising the weekly stipend. In this group were the early 'limners', itinerants who journeyed through New England to fill a demand for inexpensive 'likenesses'. Without benefit of art schooling, these painters were nevertheless professional, and left for posterity portraits frequently enough as austere in spirit as the people who sat for them, as inventive as the lives of those isolated and self-sufficient people had to be.

Other artists of the people worked to a large extent in sectional groups in communities or settlements. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Pennsylvania Dutch made illuminated records of vital statistics in a manner stemming from German folk art. At about the same period the *santero* of New Mexico produced for religious needs starkly primitive paintings and sculpture (*retablos* and *bultos*), the sculpture often life size and imbued with the agony of the Spanish Inquisition. Under the spell of spiritual rapture, the Shakers made inspirational pictures. Amateur painting—generally luscious still lifes on velvet—came from fashionable seminaries; dioramas of current disasters and travelogues—precursors of the motion picture—tavern signs, wall paintings and carriage decorations merely suggest the variety and extent of this category of art in America.

The tradition continues today with the practise of home-made art by an apparently greater number of lay people than ever before. Moreover, through individuality and wide latitude of expressiveness in their work, they have reached a peak of distinction.

Most of the earlier works now æsthetically accepted were regarded in their time as essentially utilitarian. Generally looked upon as objects for secular or for religious use, little artistic importance was attached to them. The artists themselves shared this point of view; their wares were seldom signed. Family records replete with information about the portrait-sitter fail to mention the painter. Apart from the existence of the canvas, little trace of him or his activities remains. Almost exclusively the product of the twentieth century is the evaluation of his output as art, as it was not until the 1920's that its significance from this standpoint was felt.

One can accept as the immediate reason the posthumous acclaim of the great modern primitive, Henri Rousseau, who during his life was ridiculed except by a perceiving few. Behind this reason is a more encompassing one. It is related to the receptivity, the sensibility of perception that develop in a given period. At the turn of the century a fresh consciousness brought about an artistic evaluation of primitive art. Except for the stirring of appreciation by Courbet and a small circle of his friends in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, pre-Renaissance painting and archaic art in general had been considered only of ethnological, anthropological and archæological interest. In our century these expressions began to activate artists such as the young Picasso and Matisse whose concepts, contributing so vitally to the artistic revolution in twentieth-century painting, show this impact.

It was fundamentally the advent of the machine that conditioned the force and austerity, the primitive power of our period and directed us back to spiritual ancestors in other æsthetic beginnings. In determining our own morphology, almost five centuries of illusionist painting were challenged. Perspective and verisimilitude were discarded as outworn and ineffectual by the Cubists who considered the canvas in painters' terms, as a flat plane upon which pictorial elements were to be integrated two-dimensionally. Subsequently the Renaissance achievement of deep space took its place not as an end, but at the service of







MORRIS HIRSHFIELD. *Nude at Window*. Oil. 1941

*Collection: Art of this Century, New York*



WILLIAM SAMET. Cell Interior—Artist at Easel. Oil. 1936



GREGORIO VALDES. Cuban Landscape

*Collection : Elizabeth Bishop, Key*



another point of view: Surrealists re-employed illusionism, imaginatively altering it for psychological emphasis.

Although completely innocent of it, the contemporary primitive, by virtue of his results, crosses both these streams of the modern movement. It is his unfulfilled wish to attain traditional deep space, but since he gives equal importance to everything in his composition, as do the Cubists, he is rarely able to achieve his aim. Simplification of form, sharp demarcation of colour and lack of chiaroscuro are almost invariable characteristics, as they are with abstract painters. In striving for verisimilitude, he compulsively invents, and as a result his work is frequently highly expressive, reaching beyond reality or containing fantasy as does that of the Surrealists. Perennially the primitive, he nevertheless intuitively absorbs ideas from the contemporary atmosphere.

Apart from the fact that the spirit of this era is sympathetic to all primitive cultures, the profound development in international painting centred in Paris during the twentieth century has demonstrated the wisdom of determining the validity of any expression on the basis of its own terms. That this attitude should have been brought to contemporary self-taught art is inevitable. With this tool the work of each painter, especially since it may be regarded as unique, can in the main be evaluated individually. Common to the self-taught artist is a humility of expression and an easily comprehended human quality that may be shared by everyone. Still, each creates his own world, and this he does with a surprising enterprise and courage born of his very innocence. Motivated by an inner drive, he paints even if he can only do so in his spare time. In the work of the most interesting of these artists, through sureness of intuition a harmony is achieved between emotion and idea and the medium through which they are expressed. Unlike either the art of the untutored child which develops with his years or that of the studied artist which evolves in comprehension and craft, the painting of the self-taught artist most frequently comes to virtual fruition with the making of his first picture.

Before actually painting, he goes through a series of rudimentary unconsummated painting gestures which help to mature him. Often these cursory gestures are tied up with his craft as in the case of the house painter, sign painter, furniture finisher,

cabinet maker or decorator, who is naturally led into painting as an extension of already developed motor activity. Many aspects of his work spring directly from occupational activities. Others who do not have such backgrounds frequently have what may be called a craft sense about their tasks; conscientious, ingenious, deft, they obtain an æsthetic gratification in the same way as do craftsmen in the execution of their crafts.

With many of the self-taught painters psychological factors which are tied up with inner conflicts of various kinds are of primary importance. The necessity for working out their psychological problems furnishes one of the mainsprings out of which their pictorial means flow, for through sublimation in paint they resolve their doubts, their emotions and their beliefs. In men like Hirshfield and Samet, it is at the root of their need to paint. This may be observed in individual works by these artists reproduced here and is enlarged upon in the accompanying discussions.

Presented here are but four of some thirty foremost contemporary American painters in this field, one of whom, Hirshfield, inventive and powerfully archaic, approaches the level of achievement reached by Rousseau.

#### ISREAL LITWAK

Born Russia 1868. Emigrated to America in 1903. Married, 2 children.

Occupational Background: Furniture Finisher and Cabinet Maker.

Retired at the age of 68, after which he began to draw.

Exhibited: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1939.

*They Taught Themselves*, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1942.

Resides in Brooklyn.

#### ‘FIFTH AVENUE’

Winging directly over the trees and buildings in Litwak's *Fifth Avenue* is an expanse of bright yellow colour. All of the artist's scenes have this light which he is convinced depicts the earth's atmosphere, but here it is so pronounced that it becomes tangible and resembles distant mountains.

The steep lines of traffic which first attract the eye are most amusingly conceived. Motor-cars travelling uptown are unorganized, but the downtown traffic approaches in train-like fashion. Completely regimented in line, they are telescoped as though the driver of the front car unexpectedly jammed on his brakes. Added to the general hubbub, as an increased hazard to

driving, the cars along the curb are precariously tilted in the scooped out saucer-like street.

The strolling figures on either sidewalk are decked out in their Sunday best. Their faces resemble those of ancient Sumerians, all in profile save one. As one seeks out this exception, the picture becomes a sort of æsthetic game, full of the unexpected, and invites the observer to participate in the playing of it. Only a few of the clues will be given here.

The row of buildings to the right is compacted into a many-faceted cabinet. The variously-sized blue windows set in the yellow, burnt sienna, grey, tan and white facades, are flutings, and the cornices and other trims make decorations of carving and marquetry to adorn this cabinet maker's architecture. This effect is due in no small measure to the embossed surfaces which come from Litwak's technique of tracing from a drawing with deeply-incised lines. As a point in the game the observer is asked to identify the façade-in-search-of-a-building.

This row of buildings, ever exceptional, recedes into deep space, but not by formal diminishing perspective, as the height of the individual storeys on the distant buildings is more or less the same as those in the foreground. Litwak invents his own recession by reducing the number of storeys of his buildings; the retreating steps of the roofs in relation to the line of the curb create the illusion of distance. All that remains of the final building is but a single storey. The structures increasingly encroach upon the sidewalk and by the time the last house is reached, egress is cut off completely.

It is obvious that Litwak drew in the figures after the architecture had been drawn. The people are oriented to the sidewalk space. For a twofold reason, he does not allow them to overlap the buildings: his beloved architecture must retain its inviolability, and yet it would never do for the people to be marred by the deeply-incised architectural lines. (Another reason, common to all self-taught art, is that overlapping rarely occurs.)

The two oncoming women are poised on the curb since they must find room for themselves within the angles formed by the buildings and the curb. Further forward the figures are not troubled with this problem—they have more headroom.

On the other side of the street the red brick wall divides the walk from the park and controls the pedestrians the same way



the architecture does. The people in the foreground move about freely, but as the walk narrows those further along are crowded to the outer edge. Finally where little room is left, the last three unhappy figures are sandwiched between snugly parked cars at the curb.

The stylized design of the trees in the park and their colour remind one of the inexpensive Numdah Indian rugs sold at department stores. The lamp-posts set amidst the trees diminish in height as they recede, but all of their lights remain the same size.

Another part of the game may be noted in the drawing of the branches of the two trees at the extreme left. The trees are in the park considerably beyond the wall, and still their branches extend in front of the lamp-post at the curb. The very amusing engraving by Hogarth which tests one's powers of observation is brought to mind. It is filled with perspective oddities and is titled *Burlesque Perspective*. With Hogarth this game is one of conscious burlesque presented for the amusement of the knowing observer and is intended to destroy the pictorial values in his engraving. With Litwak's painting, seriously conceived, it is humour unconsciously born of a personal way of seeing, and ably integrated, that creates authentic pictorial means.

#### MORRIS HIRSHFIELD

Born Russia-Poland 1872. Emigrated to America at the age of 18.

Married, 3 children.

Occupational Background: Cloak and Suit Manufacturer, 12 years. Head of E Z Walk Slipper Co., 15 years.

Retired because of ill-health in 1935 at the age of 63.

First picture started in 1937, completed in 1939.

Exhibited: *Unknown American Painters*, Museum of Modern Art, 1939.

*They Taught Themselves*, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1942.

*The Paintings of Morris Hirshfield* (30 paintings, total work to date), Museum of Modern Art, 1943.

Resides in Brooklyn.

#### 'NUDE AT THE WINDOW'

*Nude at the Window*<sup>1</sup> was painted directly after *Girl in the Mirror*, Hirshfield's first painting of a nude. In the latter he subconsciously avoided presenting a front view; the figure turned from the observer faces a mirror, but her reflection, instead of returning according to the laws of optics as a front view, is repeated as a back view. It is an interesting commentary on the evolution of

<sup>1</sup> The artist's full title is *Nude at the Window, Hot Night in July*.

his own attitudes that he was now able to give a forthright portrayal of a nude. Intuitively he has come to understand that the nature of the subject matter itself is subordinate to the higher morality of the creation of a work of art, and this undoubtedly enabled him to overcome his former reticence.

Like a dazzling apparition, this ivory pink creature with yellow, blond hair emerges from the mysterious black depths which we know are no more than the interior of a darkened room. The brilliant red drapes striped with black and yellow are gently held aside by one hand; the other drape responds before it is touched as if the girl controlled it magically.

Around her, the darkened room which is her background takes on the contour of a huge black vase, and at the top of the vase a valance with two pendants appears. The figure within levitates above exquisitely designed slippers which are themselves suspended. The whole is like a reincarnation in a funerary urn.

The vase may be considered a significant, subconsciously achieved form, paraphrasing the human form. The outline contours of the nude are conceived as a set of two continuous curving lines. One begins under the arm, follows down around the torso and legs, taking in the sweep of the abdomen in an oyster-shaped arc on the way, and ends under the other arm. An interesting anatomical variation is the rendering of one thigh in profile, the other in front view.

The other continuous line, starting and ending at the chest, encompasses the breasts, arms and head. Divided into two sections, then, the nude consists of two forms delineated by flowing lines and set upon each other; and the forms are tacked in place at the breasts. Scallops bordering the drapes compulsively repeat this latter motif, interrupted but briefly by the introduction of the hand and momentarily displaced to make room for the foot. The repeating lines of the drapes which surround the nude complement its curvilinear rhythms and are like magnetic currents emanating from the figure.

WILLIAM SAMET

Born Astoria, L.I., 1908. Unmarried.

Imprisoned Dannemora Prison, N.Y.

Prison Occupation: Metal Worker. Optional Interest: Painting.

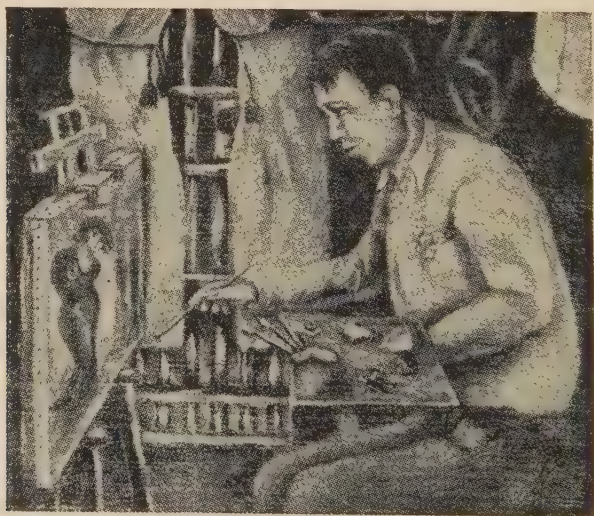
Exhibited: *Unknown American Painters*, Museum of Modern Art, 1939.

## 'CELL INTERIOR: ARTIST AT EASEL'

*Cell Interior* is a penetrating portrait of the *Artist at Easel*. Receding perspectives enclosing the lone figure make it the same basic composition as Valdes' *Cuban Landscape*. The enclosure in the latter picture is subjective alone; but here it is both subjective and factual.

If the painter and his easel were lifted out of their environment, the detail would represent the usual artist working concentratedly upon his canvas, a portrait of a young girl. Emotional significance appears not in the self portrait but in the surroundings. The figure is walled in by metal-coloured brick and recurring throughout the painting are disconsolate and jaundiced areas of mustard browns and wan yellows. His sun is an electric bulb. The agonized handling of drapes and clothing on the wall are definite subconscious reflections. The formidable bars across the cell opening have been softened by curtains, but the environment closing in on all sides, the feeling of confinement, is intense.

The painting reproduced here exists today in photograph only. In 1940 Samet repainted the self-portrait and the easel. Although separated from the original by only four years, the second version reveals an older and embittered figure, and the picture on the easel, instead of a young girl, is that of a wanton.





## GREGORIO VALDES

Born in Cuba, 1879-1939.

Lived most of his life in Key West, Fla., where he died. Married, 7 children.

Occupational Background: Sign Painter, House Painter.

Signed many works in style similar to legend on Spanish paintings. He included the title, his name and address in the composition across the bottom of the picture.

Exhibited: Artists' Gallery, New York, 1939, one month before his death.

*Unknown American Painters*, Museum of Modern Art, 1939.

*They Taught Themselves*, San Francisco Museum of Art, 1942.

## 'CUBAN LANDSCAPE'

The picture is exceedingly small, but the scale does not diminish the grandeur of the palms nor confine the nostalgic expanse of space. The configuration of the man and the donkey is that of a tiny pendant set jewel-like in the landscape.

Light reflected from the evening sky silhouettes the dark green palms. Strangely, from the opposite direction, where the observer stands, another light enters the picture, as if the artist stood at the head of the road, his eyes shining upon it like automobile headlights. In looking along the road we see that all the trees on either side are lit up on the inside by these 'headlights'. Brilliant at the picture frame, this light diffuses as it travels up the road.

Curiously enough, neither trees nor figures cast shadows. One may well believe that the light emanating from the sky equals that which shines in from the foreground, and shadows become neutralized. Photographers often play one light against the other when they wish to eliminate shadows. It is hardly possible, though, that Valdes knew of such a sophisticated device. Shadows do not appear simply because it probably never occurred to him to use them, a common omission with self-taught artists. Valdes' use of light gives to the picture the mysterious effect of an inner light in a natural world—the isolation of the artist's vision.

We wish to thank the publishers, Dial Press, New York, for their kind permission to reproduce the four plates, together with accompanying discussions, from the book *They Taught Themselves, American Primitive Paintings of the Twentieth Century* by Sidney Janis.

# ALYSE GREGORY

## DENIS DIDEROT

WHEN, in the salon of Mme Geoffrin at a long anticipated meeting, Diderot was introduced for the first time to Fontenelle, and saw before him a little old shrivelled-up man approaching his hundredth year and dangling an ear trumpet, he burst into a fit of weeping. Fontenelle, who, like the Abbé Galiani, had never been known to shed a single tear, inquired somewhat drily the cause of so spectacular a loss of control. 'It is,' Diderot answered, 'that I am impressed with a very singular sentiment.' He could hardly explain to the notoriously unsentimental author of *The Plurality of Worlds* that his clumsy emotion was due to his sudden desolating realization of 'the vanity of literary fame and all human things'. The episode was characteristic of Diderot, of the impressionability of his heart, and of the closeness to experience of his philosophy. It is an index to what made him both so endearing and so eminent a figure of his time. For of all the great Frenchmen of the eighteenth century he alone seems to have received, if not always the whole-hearted approval of commentators and historians, at least their affection. Voltaire has been held up to M. Faguet's inquisitorial disdain, while Rousseau made so many enemies that he could never flee far enough away to escape them all. Diderot made but one, and that one was Rousseau; and it is again characteristic of Diderot that it was through his defence of one friend that he lost the other.

Denis Diderot was born at Langres on 5 October 1713, one year after Rousseau, and nineteen years after Voltaire. His father was an upright and industrious cutler, who, regarded this eldest child of his—he had one other son and a daughter—with a combination of pride, apprehension, and benevolent austerity. He allowed him at an early age to attend a Jesuit school in Paris, and Diderot intended to become a priest. This project was soon abandoned, and he studied law with an old friend of his father's, but rapidly lost interest in so dry an employment. When admonished that it was necessary for him to choose a career he replied that it would not be the law, as 'he had no wish to spend all his days in doing other people's business,' and it would not be

medicine, as 'he had no turn for killing'. On being pressed as to what, then, he did propose to do, he answered: 'But, *ma foi!* nothing at all, nothing at all. I love studies and ask for nothing more.' From this moment he was turned adrift to fend for himself. Certain early years of Diderot's life remain obscure to his biographers. We know that he taught mathematics to a rich man's languid sons, but decided that he would prefer to starve at his pleasure than to stuff himself with the best victuals in Paris and be harnessed to so tedious an engagement. Even as a tiny boy he had said that he would rather be impatient than bored, though no one could be more patient than he if his interest was aroused, and he was very fond of children, having once observed that he loved and respected children and old men because he regarded them 'as singular beings who had suffered a great deal and who had been spared by fate'. He returned from his teaching to a life of semi-vagabondage, picking up odd bits of work, among which was that of composing sermons for a missionary to be distributed in the Portuguese colonies. It was in a café at this epoch that he first came across Rousseau, who had hoped to astonish Paris by his accomplishments as a musician, but, concluding that this was out of the question, had transferred all his ambitions to perfecting himself in the game of chess, at which he aimed to outwit the entire world.

Diderot once likened himself to the weathercock on the church tower of Langres, but it was not an instability of nature that made him thus susceptible; it was his avid intellectual curiosity and his passion for experience that turned him round according to the direction promising him the greatest excitement. '*Vif, ardent, et fou,*' he could be seen at all seasons of the year on the Paris boulevards, dressed in a grey plush suit with torn cuffs, his black woollen stockings darned with white cotton, his head thrust forward in the way that Keats used to carry his head, as if for ever in pursuit of truth for ever in flight. Even his walking stick he manipulated as if holding it out for the passers by to see.' Diderot always had the air of rushing breathlessly toward life as if he were about to fling himself into the arms of a mistress. He used to frequent a bookshop on the Quai des-Augustins, as much because he was attracted by the daughter of the proprietor, Mlle Gabrielle Babuti, as to ferret out answers to the riddle of the universe, answers, indeed, that he never did quite hit upon. This



young woman, who later became the wife of Greuze the painter, was not unresponsive to his advances, and it is supposed that they enjoyed moments of pleasure together. At the same time that Diderot discovered Mlle Babuti he discovered Voltaire. He picked up his *Lettres philosophiques* in the shop one day, and, standing with it open before him, continued to turn over the leaves for so many hours that his companion was at last piqued into reminding him that life was not all paper and print. This book had a definite influence on Diderot, for though he kept his head in the air his thoughts were seldom in the clouds. He was neither a visionary nor a man of science. He was an explorer into every crevice of life—sensual, intellectual, and of the market place. He delighted in discussions, he delighted even more in wandering alone by the side of the river, he adored making love, he enjoyed eating enormously, he set great store by his friends, and Nature was ever for him the chief source of man's wisdom and happiness upon earth. It was he who first imbued Rousseau with his ardour in this direction. Diderot peered, probed, and reconnoitred in every direction, opening his heart and his pocket-book to everybody who crossed his path, and observing shrewdly and benevolently the springs of human behaviour.

It was in 1741 that he first met Antoinette Champion, a seamstress, three years his senior, who was living alone with her widowed mother. They were married two years later after she she had become his mistress. In matters of marital unhappiness it is usually dangerous to place the blame anywhere but on luck. Diderot's daughter worshipped her father and defended her mother. She said that the souring of her mother's nature was due partly to her father's jealousy, which caused him to keep her away from society in their early life together, partly to their poverty—they had four children of whom only this one daughter survived—but most of all to her father's infidelities. She compared her mother's nature to a piece of rock crystal, noble at the centre but with protruding edges. Unfortunately, in daily life, it is the edges of which we are most constantly aware. It was inevitable that Diderot should become restive with a woman like Mme Diderot, who was a bigoted Catholic, and incapable of understanding either her husband's thoughts or her own. He tried, often with great patience, in their early days together to reconcile their two natures, sometimes beating his head against the wall in

desperation. On one occasion, more than ever distraught, he dashed off pell-mell to her priest, who merely looked on at his gesticulations as a frog might stare at a floating leaf in a pond, without a single blink, which set Diderot in a still greater rage, but this time his fury was directed against the Church.

It was when Mme Diderot was away on a visit to his parents at Langres that Diderot formed a relationship with Mme de Puisieux—referred to by Carlyle as ‘the scarlet woman’—who was for some years his mistress. She was a writer of even more mediocre talent than Louise Colet, and grasping as well. Fidelity, Diderot once defined, as ‘the obstinacy and the punishment of a good man and a good woman’.

The first work of Diderot’s which brought upon him the attention of the thinking world was his *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749) and, as with much of his writing, it is amazingly modern in theory. It had for its essential doctrine that ‘all knowledge is relative to our experience, that thought is not the measure of existence, nor the conceivableness of a proposition the test of its truth, and that our experience is not the limit to the possibilities of things’. It was revolutionary enough at the time to land him in prison, fortunately with a volume of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in his pocket, and M. du Châtelet, the husband of Voltaire’s Emilie, as his jailer. He devised a method of writing by scraping the slate at the side of his window and grinding it to a fine powder which he mixed with some wine in a broken glass. For pen he used a toothpick. His wife used to visit him at one hour and Mme de Puisieux at another. On one of the occasions of the latter’s visits his suspicions were aroused by the fact that she was dressed in an unusually gay manner. She swore, when questioned, that she was attending a fête that evening at Champigny, where no one was to accompany her. Diderot, increasingly suspicious, later scaled the prison walls, went to Champigny, discovered her leaning amorously on the arm of a rival, and at once went off, sleeping the night in the park. In the morning he restored himself to the authorities. He had been permanently cured of his passion for the unfortunate Mme de Puisieux. ‘In love I think like a sage and act like a fool,’ he once wrote. Diderot’s daughter, in her reminiscences of her father, says that his habits were always ‘good’, that he never liked ‘*les femmes de spectacle ni les filles publiques*’. She goes on to recount that he was once in love with

a dancer at the opera, and persuaded a friend who lived opposite this girl, to allow him to spy on her from one of his windows. One day he saw her attiring herself, and as she pulled on her stockings she rubbed out the spots with a piece of chalk. With every spot that vanished Diderot's passion diminished, and by the time she had disposed of the last one his heart was as whole as her stockings. Diderot has been frequently criticized for talking so freely with this daughter, even as a child; but his indiscretions were always pointed by sober explanations and sound advice. Indeed he treated his little Angélique in an unusually imaginative manner. He always doted on her, and spared neither time nor pains to develop her individual nature, and to counteract the stern disciplines of her mother. When, in the end, he had to give her over to a husband, he experienced a sharp and bewildering access of jealousy which at first caused him chagrin, and then caused him to laugh heartily at himself.

Many people will perhaps have forgotten that the famous eighteenth-century French Encyclopædia had its inception from Chambers English Dictionary, those quaint volumes, now so out-moded, but still packed with so much pithy and relevant information. Le Breton, a bookseller of Paris, asked Diderot to translate the dictionary into French. In his capacious, excitable, and fecund brain the idea became gradually transformed, and he persuaded Le Breton to allow him to collect from the eminent thinkers of the day articles embodying the new ideas in philosophy, science, and literature, and to incorporate them in a series of volumes (in the end there were thirty-five). The consent of the government was secured, d'Alembert agreed to act as his chief collaborator, and in 1750 the first prospectus was issued. For nearly twenty-five years (1748-1772) this stupendous work engaged all Diderot's best energies. He had to meet not only the abuse of his enemies but the desertion of his friends; and what was even worse, the Ecclesiastical Party, seeing the influence of the encyclopædia spreading and subscribers steadily increasing, managed, in 1759, to have it formally suppressed. To our present-day view the articles appear surprisingly mild. There is no open attack upon religion, or even upon the abuses of the Church. What was alarming to the authorities was the manner in which the contributions took for granted the justice of speculative freedom and religious tolerance. D'Alembert, becoming frightened,



resigned his post. The decree did not forbid the continuance of the work and Diderot, excluded both from the Royal Society of London, and from the French Academy, laboured on alone. The crowning stroke came when, just as the enterprise was nearing its completion, he discovered that Le Breton had all the time been deleting without detection, from the corrected proofs, every passage or paragraph which he thought might displease the authorities, while at the same time destroying the original text. Diderot was so struck down by this final betrayal that he burst into a flood of tears, fled from the room, and refused ever again to address another word to Le Breton. The three events of Diderot's life which caused him his greatest anguish were his quarrel with Rousseau, his father's death, and Le Breton's perfidy; and it was the last that pierced deepest into the bone. It was not only the ignorant mangling of his life work that so overwhelmed him, but the responsibility he felt toward his contributors, and his fear that they might think he had deceived them. So undiscerning are even the most intelligent readers, however, that the monstrous liberties taken by this craven type setter were hardly even remarked upon, and Diderot had, by some chance, kept duplicates of the original articles.

It is satisfactory to know that during the last half of his life Diderot had a friend, incomparably dear to him, to whom he could always turn for refreshment. The exact date of his meeting with Louise-Henriette Volland (it was he who gave her the name of Sophie to symbolize wisdom, saying that she was wiser than Socrates' Aspasia) is not known, but it is supposed to have taken place during Mme Diderot's second visit to Langres in 1756. Diderot was then forty-three and Sophie was nearing her fortieth year. She was living with her mother, a rich widow who had two other daughters, on the rue des Vieux-Augustins, and Diderot spent most of his time between his workroom and their home. He used to visit Sophie by a secret staircase at the back of the house, until one day they were discovered together by her mother. Up to our own century it always remained a hotly contested point as to whether Sophie Volland was, in fact, Diderot's mistress, a matter that absorbed half the pedants of Europe, only pedants having, apparently, the necessary combination of pertinacity, leisure, and frivolity to pursue such evasive points to their last vanishing place. One venerable old canon living in Langres,

a celebrated authority on the Diderot family, with a bitter hatred for Diderot, is said to have bounded out of his chair as if he had been stung by a wasp at the mere intimation that their love was a 'blameless' one. On the other hand, M. Michel Corday, who has written a book on 'the love life' of Diderot, was strongly of the opinion that such a relationship was entirely out of the question owing to certain ambiguous and rueful references Diderot made in some of his later letters to Sophie about his *nullité*, M. Corday assuming that no man could write without extreme humiliation about such a matter, and that the last person to whose notice he would ever care to bring it would be to that of his mistress. It is only since a recent edition of Diderot's letters has appeared, published by the Babelon Press (1931), with passages heretofore deleted now copied in from the original text, that the matter has been, to all unprejudiced minds, finally resolved. If the eighteenth century ironically shrugged its shoulders over the *liaison* and the nineteenth century sought to exonerate Sophie from having given herself to Diderot, the twentieth century may, in its turn, exonerate her from having refused herself to him. During ten years of their intimacy she was forced to spend six months of each year at the family château at the Isle-sur-Marne in Champagne; and it is due to these absences of hers that we owe some of the best of Diderot's letters. No exact description of Sophie has come down to us. Diderot used to carry a picture of her in the fly-leaf of his Horace which he had always with him. We know that she wore glasses, that she was slight in build, and that she was universally praised for her *finesse*, her candour, and her brilliant intellect. Grimm refers to her passion for philosophy, another visitor to their house remarks that she has the 'wit of a demon', and M. Tronchin, with a final flourish, tells us that she had 'the soul of an eagle in a frame of gauze'. Diderot himself continually praises her good sense, her sensitive and elevated heart, and her noble intelligence—'*la plus belle âme de femme qu'il ait sous le ciel*'. It is seldom that anyone in any age, or in any country, is fortunate enough to discover someone to whom he can reveal, without regret or apprehension, the multiple sides of his nature. Diderot has frequently been accused of grossness because of certain things that he wrote in his letters to Sophie Volland, but he was no more gross than Flaubert was gross. He was broad spoken in the Rabelaisian sense and he was certainly greedy, but to enjoy good

food and to acknowledge it is, surely, to be honest rather than gross. Dr. Johnson once quoted an eminent statesman as saying that most great men died of overeating (a fate he perhaps realized was to be his own).

No one has ever spoken more freshly, more movingly from the heart, than did Diderot in the pages of these letters. It is as if we could hear the very inflexion of his voice, watch the changing expressions of his round, animated, adoring eye. This is the rich mine that every biographer of Diderot has furtively or boldly quarried. Even Carlyle, with his uncouth sneers about 'an elderly spinster' and 'a virtuous wife', and Morley, the civilized English gentleman, self-consciously embarrassed, have had, perforce, to study with sober zeal these indiscreet and sprightly records. They are a perfect reflection of Diderot's conversation, and he was considered the outstanding talker of his time, though it was a complaint frequently brought against him that he was more given to expounding than to listening. But if he could sometimes exhaust his friends, he seldom bored them and he never alienated them. The monologues of Coleridge, the great talker of *his* day, to whom Diderot has been compared, were like illuminated hoops in the sky, for ever circling round and round with nowhere to jump on and nowhere to jump off, and comprehensible only to himself. Diderot always kept close to actual life. If he was ingenuous he was also sage ('a sage in frenzy'); if he was emphatic he was also *fine*; if he was exuberant he was also weighty; and he was, above all, a Frenchman living in Paris in the eighteenth century who had kept abreast with every new idea, every new discovery, every new metaphysical and theological whimsey. He could shift from subject to subject as easily as a boy leaps over a stream. He could write an advertisement for some hair tonic to help a starving scribbler, or fling himself with a transport of enthusiasm into a study of Hobbes' *Treatise on Human Nature*. He flirted, gossiped, intrigued, analysed, visited peasants and cobblers; went to theatres and concerts and always kept his eyes and ears open to what was going on about him; and all this vast and varied activity was mirrored in these matchless letters. There is no aspect of life that does not receive attention. Anecdotes tragic, comic, equivocal, scandalous, complicated, and pathetic follow one upon the other. An exalted expression of his love is succeeded by an exact enumeration of the delicious dishes he has just injudiciously



eaten at the table of the Baron d'Holbach, at whose house on the rue Saint-Thomas, and later, at the rue Royale-Saint Roche, the most distinguished men of the time were royally entertained. 'Imaginez,' he writes of his host, 'un satyre, gai, piquant, indécent et nerveux. . . . Il n'auroit ni offensé, ni embarrassé ma Sophie parce que ma Sophie est homme et femme quand il lui plait.' When Hume visited Paris it was at the Baron d'Holbach's that he stayed most frequently. On one of these occasions he happened to remark that in England there were no atheists, to which his host replied: 'Look about you. You will see seventeen people at this table. Of these fourteen are atheists and the other three have not yet made up their minds.' Horace Walpole wrote back in a letter to Selwyn, 'I sometimes go to Baron d'Holbach's but I have left off his dinners, as there was no bearing the authors and philosophers and savants of which he has a pigeon house full. . . . In short, nonsense for nonsense, I liked the Jesuits better.' Horace Walpole was certainly the great authority of his day on nonsense, but of a somewhat different variety from that to be found in either of the circles he mentioned.

In the spring of 1773 (the year that Johnson travelled to the Hebrides) Diderot paid his famous visit to his great benefactress, Catherine II of Russia. He was inordinately flattered by her reception of him, but he was no courtier—far from it—he was a man who frequently lost his wig (on this occasion he had to return home without it, a fact he sought to conceal from his wife), and who dressed at the gaudy court in the same plain black suit which served him so well when he stole out regularly every Sunday to make love to his Sophie. His irrepressible and irresponsible enthusiasms drove him resistlessly forward, and yet his heart was easily wounded. He had, as he said of himself, no gift for society, being 'either silent or indiscreet', more often the latter. To Bjornsthäl he once remarked that he never found hours pass slowly in the company of a peasant, or a cobbler, or a handicraftsman, but that he had many a time found them pass slowly in the company of courtiers. Catherine treated him with spirit, indulgence, and caution, the kind of caution that prompted her to place a small table between them in their daily talks from three to five (there were sixty in all) to protect her knees, his daughter recounts, from his too vehement gesticulations. He never ceased to praise her wit, her charm, her statesmanship. 'She has the soul of Cæsar

with the seductions of Cleopatra', was his observation of her. Of him she remarked that he sometimes looked like a boy of twelve, sometimes like an old man of a hundred. Diderot did indeed have the capacity of changing expression in an astonishing manner. In criticizing a portrait of himself painted by Michel Van Loo he said, 'That dainty coquet is not I. . . . I had in one day a hundred different expressions according to the thing by which I was affected. I was serene, sad, dreamy, tender, violent, passionate, enthusiastic. . . . I had a big forehead, sparkling eyes, fair-sized features, a head like an ancient orator, a good nature which amounted almost to foolishness, and the rustic manners of old times.' Meister spoke of his profile as being distinguished by a sublime character of male beauty, the habitual expression of his eyes sensitive and gentle, his mouth a mixture of *finesse*, grace, and good nature. But Diderot was by no means a simple character, though he was a transparent one. When he left the court the Empress presented him with a superb fur-lined cloak and a ring with a stone on which was engraved her own portrait, a gift he treasured above all others. It is an irreparable loss to posterity that his undoubtedly voluminous correspondence with Catherine should have been destroyed for reasons of caution at the time of the French Revolution.

As a writer Diderot's gifts were uneven. His articles in the encyclopædia on the philosophers—Aristotle, Plato, Spinoza, Leibnitz, etc.—still impress us with their originality. His vast reading was always sifted through a sceptical and aroused intelligence. He was a forerunner of Darwin and Lamarck, and in his *Interprétation de la Nature* (1754) he traced in a startling manner the evolutionist theory, a theory that at the time was derided by Voltaire. In his *Rêve de d'Alembert* he propounded the then ingenious supposition, familiar enough to us now, that the human body was but an aggregate of countless living organisms. Diderot's materialism remained always consistently Lucretian, in the sense that it was upheld by imaginative enthusiasm rather than by cold scientific deduction. His fealty to nature was the source of his most intense and his most lucid insights. 'One may compare ideas which have no foundation in nature,' he wrote, 'to those forests of the North whose trees have no roots. It needs only a breath of wind, only a small fact, to overturn a whole forest of trees and ideas.' It was this attitude of his which made him attack

morality and religion while at the same time defending virtue. Carlyle, who disapproved of Diderot's atheism, refers to his 'dwelling all his life on the thin rind of the conscious', and adds with his usual sententiousness: 'Thus must the sanctuary of man's soul stand perennially shut against this man'—Carlyle, whom Nietzsche, in his turn, described as 'an English atheist who aspired to honour for not being one'.

As a playwright Diderot was never completely successful. What was revolutionary and invigorating in his attitude toward the stage was largely neutralized by the fact that he lacked creative imagination. This also was apparent in his works of fiction. His *Jacques le Fataliste* (admired and translated by Goethe) is witty and brilliant, but it is also monotonous and feeble, like a bird with wings outspread that never quite takes to flight. He had been influenced by Sterne, whom he met in Paris (1762), but he had not Sterne's power of invention nor his capacity to create character. His most outstanding work in this genre is his *Neveu de Rameau*, and the secret of its felicity lies largely in the fact that the central figure is an exaggerated portrait of Diderot himself. It is a dialogue full of verve, and on every page there is something that leaps up like a cricket from dry August grass. It was characteristic of him that his famous art criticisms should have had their origin in a desire to gratify his friend Grimm, who, obsequious to please his royal patrons in the North, begged Diderot to jot him down some notes about the Salon of 1761. Among all Diderot's staggering activities studying pictures had never for some reason been included, but he at once set off to do as he was asked. His taste could certainly be attacked, and has been by M. Brunetière, to whom Diderot's nature is so secretly disturbing. Sainte-Beuve, on the other hand, hails him as the first true art critic of France, and he was without doubt the first critic who aroused in the public any lively desire to study pictures for the pleasure to be received from them. There were two points, always the same, from which Diderot started out in his appraisal of pictures—the heart and nature. This is why he so often contradicted himself, and did not mind contradicting himself. Are not both the heart and nature given to contradictions? It is also why his criticisms were so vivid, so cogent, so original, so stimulating, and to artists so inspiring; and it is why they were so often beside the mark. Not that he did not require



unity in a composition—*la conspiration général des mouvements*—but first of all he must feel behind it some primal freshness and force of intention; or as Cézanne, at so much later a time put it, 'Primary force alone . . . can bring a person to the end he must attain. . . .' '*Les arts de génie naissent et s'éteignent avec les passions*,' Diderot wrote; and '*C'est que le bon stile est dans le cœur*'. But even if his art criticisms, judged purely æsthetically, leave something to be desired, the correspondence that stimulated them, as with his letters to Sophie Volland, remain a matchless record of the literary and artistic life of the epoch. They were not published in book form during his lifetime, but must have been freely circulated as they are mentioned in memoirs of the time.

The relationship existing between Voltaire and Diderot is prolific of interest. They were profoundly different in temperament. Voltaire (who always preferred d'Alembert to Diderot) upheld the monarchy, he was incapable of any complete detachment from mundane values, he was a classicist, an aristocrat in taste, and a Deist without the smallest religious emotion. What he shared in common with Diderot was his rage against cruelty and bigotry, his boundless intellectual curiosities, and his noble tolerance. Voltaire's incomparable literary graces, his limpid, tintillating ironies were outside Diderot's powers altogether. If Swift's wit was 'a razor dipped in oil', Voltaire's was a Toledo blade dipped in a shimmering mountain cascade. Diderot's was neither so deadly as Swift's nor so glancing as Voltaire's, but of the three he was the most truly philosophic, using the word in its widest sense. It was not without reason that he could write to Sophie Volland: 'That I should be acclaimed! That I should be rich! That I should be beneficent yesterday! Tomorrow all may change, and I may remain humble, poor, and useless, without it causing me an instant's chagrin!' It would be impossible to imagine the Dean of St. Patrick's or the sage of Ferney expressing, or even contemplating expressing, a similar sentiment. There is in record but one meeting between Voltaire and Diderot. It was when Voltaire, surfeited with glory, made his last jubilant entry into Paris. Of Diderot he said, 'He lacks one talent, and an essential one—that of dialogue'. Of Voltaire, Diderot remarked that he was 'like one of those old haunted castles, which are falling into ruins in every part: but you can easily perceive that it is inhabited by an ancient sorcerer'.

It was in his affections that Diderot's deepest prides were always finally centred. Even his boastings, and he was not ungiven to boasting, were childishly obvious, as when, wounded by Mme Volland's inscrutable obduracy toward him, he wrote to Sophie: 'Tell her that I am a man of honour, that nothing will make me change. Tell her that the greatest consideration in the memory of men is assured me.' Actually his reputation never seriously occupied him. He scattered his writings about with an extreme of negligence, and though he may have let his eye light now and then on posterity, it was because there was no point at which, sooner or later, it did not light. *Faire le bien et chercher le vrai*, this was the motto he tried to live up to; and the image he created of himself, and to which he remained always loyal, was that of a man of simple virtue and compassionate heart. 'No one steals my life from me', he said, 'I give it.'

In a brilliant, exhaustive, and sometimes singularly disappointing essay on Diderot, M. Faguet, who is both master and slave of his own classifications, would lead us to discover in him the perfect type of the *petit bourgeois*, an analysis which disregards altogether those sides of Diderot's nature that separate him so entirely from others. If to be audacious in thought, impetuous in action, to spend oneself ceaselessly on vagabonds, thieves, ingrates, and even on adversaries; to eschew all worldly success; and to fall in love at fifty-eight like a boy of eighteen, as Diderot fell in love with Mme de Meaux, while at the same time vowing and believing (and with reason) that his Sophie was the one and only true love of his life, is to be a *petit bourgeois*, then he was one. To be sure, he adored his old father, and treasured his early memories, and never really deserted his wife. He remained at heart a sentimentalist in an age of rationalism, but not with the sentiment of Rousseau, who was really a misanthrope, for Diderot was a sentimentalist living in 'the tumult of his sympathies', while at the same time holding intact the integrity of his perceptions. If he took us down to the dregs of human conduct it was for the sole purpose of raising us up again. He celebrated existence with an unremitting and a cognizant innocence from a heart for ever overflowing, yet for ever attentive to the sufferings about him. Like Benjamin Constant, from whom he differed so essentially in temperament, he thought life could be divided between those who enjoyed and those who suffered.

and wherever he came upon the latter he never withheld himself—not from the most humble, not from the most base. The greatest atheist of his age was in this sense the one outstanding Christian. A young man appeared one day at Diderot's door with a manuscript under his arm which he asked him to read. It turned out to be a scathing satire on Diderot himself, who inquired with some surprise why it had been brought to him. 'I am in need of bread', the young man answered, 'and I hoped you would pay me something not to print it'. Diderot, at once, deeply concerned, explained that he was too poor himself to pay anything for it, but that he was sure the brother of the Duke of Orleans, who hated him for his attacks on the Church, would buy it if he would write a dedicatory letter to accompany it. The young man answered that he did not know the Prince and that he could not write the letter. 'I will write it for you', Diderot said, putting himself immediately to the task. All fell out as had been foreseen, the Prince paid a handsome sum, and the young man dined for once on plenty.

It would be impossible to put Diderot into any final category. He was the first true individualist of France. Comte refers to him as the greatest genius of the eighteenth century. And yet it is not for his philosophy, or for his ideas, original and liberating as they were, that we continue to honour him most, it is because he was above all a man of heart. 'The language of the heart is a thousand times more varied than that of the mind', he wrote, and it is impossible to give the rules of its *dialectique*. It is these rules that in some indefinable way he communicates to us. If he has left no body of masterpieces, such as Voltaire's, behind him, he has left many lines, and many paragraphs, and even a few pages in which may be discovered writing as noble, and even as exquisite, as any in the French tongue. But above all, he has expressed an attitude toward life which will be always fortifying to dwell upon; for he gives us the courage to enjoy under duress, and the generosity to give without calculation or regret.

Diderot's health never recovered after his return from Russia. He had always suffered from violent attacks of indigestion, and was continually nauseated after eating. In the examination of his body made after his death it was discovered that there were twenty-one stones in his gall bladder, of which the smallest was as large as a walnut. His heart was enlarged to twice the



normal size, and one of his lungs was full of water. Like Balzac, who it was said kept alive on fifty thousand cups of coffee and died of fifty thousand cups of coffee, Diderot had destroyed his frame by constant sedentary labours, often working at his table for fourteen hours at a stretch, without stopping to eat.

On 22 February 1784 Sophie Volland died, and five days later Diderot had an attack of apoplexy. From this he gradually recovered, though he remained very weak. The curé of Saint Sulpice came frequently to visit him during his illness, and they conversed on the most amicable terms. Emboldened by Diderot's apparent complaisance, the curé one day ventured the suggestion that *une petite rétraction* on his part would have a beneficial effect upon the world. Diderot cut him short with the words: 'Admit, Monsieur le Curé, that I would be acting an impudent lie.' The priest continued to press his point, recalling that he had been obliged to refuse burial to Voltaire, whom Diderot had outlived by six years. To this Diderot's reply was: 'I understand you, Curé. You did not wish to bury Voltaire because he did not believe in the divinity of the Son. Very well, when I am dead, they may bury me where they like, but I declare, I, that I believe neither in the Father, nor in the Holy Spirit, nor in a single member of the entire family.'

At the instigation of Grimm, and after repeated warnings from his doctors that climbing stairs might prove fatal for him, Diderot was reluctantly persuaded to leave his modest rooms on the fourth and fifth floors of the rue Taranne, where he had lived for thirty years, and move into a sumptuous house on the rue Richelieu, provided for him by his faithful patroness Catherine. He made the change in the middle of July 1784. A fortnight later a more comfortable bed was secured for him and he said to the workmen who carried it in: 'You are taking a great deal of trouble for a piece of furniture that will not serve me for four days.' On the following day (July 30) he sat down as usual to his dinner, and at the end of the meal took an apricot. His wife remonstrated with him and he said, '*Mais quel diable de mal veux-tu que cela me fasse?*' and leaning his elbow on the table he reached over for some candied cherries. The silence became unduly prolonged, and Mme Diderot regarding him attentively perceived that he was dead. The priest, on being summoned, arrived with his holy oil, but on discovering that

Diderot was no longer alive, he refused to administer it. Mme Diderot, supported by relatives, brought pressure to bear on the curé, promising him benefices for the Church up to eighteen thousand francs if it could be announced abroad that her husband had, before his death, recanted. The curé yielded, absolution was given, and, with solemn, garish pomp, the funeral proceeded. The coffin was lowered under the flags of the Virgin at Saint Roche, and the *affreuse cérémonie*, as his daughter refers to it, was at last accomplished. It was not by the priests, however, that the final trick was to be played; for when, at a later period, the flags were taken up it was discovered that the coffin had completely vanished away, an enigma which to this hour has remained unsolved.

Diderot, who was seventy-one when he died, had outlived Sophie Volland by only three months. In her will she had left him her seven volumes of Montaigne bound in red leather, and a ring that she called her Pauline. His daughter tells us that he had reconciled himself to her death only by the conviction that she would soon follow her. How often had he written to her: *Adieu mon âme, ma vie, et tout ce qui m'est cher*, looking forward with anguish to their final separation. To her he had expressed the wish that their ashes might be mingled together. 'Everything destroys itself, everything perishes, there is only the world which remains, there is only time which endures.' It was in writing thus that he could bring himself back to a contemplation of existence without fear and without illusion.

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## STEPHEN CLAUDE

# 'THE DOOR THAT LEADS TO NOTHINGNESS'

*Extracts from the letter of an Officer serving in the Middle East*

### I. BEFORE

DEAR ALL,

I was getting tired of my Staff job and finally got permission to take a parachute course and am doing it during my leave. If I qualify, my parachuting experience will enable me to apply for the type of job I envisaged when I left the desert and for which I could only be better suited if I was ten years younger.

I arrived here on Sunday. 'Here', by the way, is the spot where parachute training takes place. So far it has been hell! I am now thirty-three and not as supple as I used to be. We have been getting up (I *sprang* up on the first morning) at 5.30 a.m.—and then P.T., exercises, etc., for four hours, till 10, in the blazing sun, cross-country runs, leaps, somersaults, mat work, track work, 'synthetic', etc. etc., non-stop—morning, afternoon and evening. The second day I was so stiff I thought I would never get out of bed. Going from one place to another is always



at the double (just like in a Jerry concentration camp), and with calves and thighs seemingly hewn out of a piece of ebony—it is quite excruciating! I think I have exerted more will-power in the last three days than during my whole lifetime! Today I feel a bit better, but my back is still one big ache. Mustering up the courage to go through the door, at a thousand feet, will be nothing (I hope) to ordering one's rigid legs into a sprint or one's naked body into a fall and a roll on the gravel when one's skin is practically burnt raw.

The instructors—N.C.O.s are *grand*. 'I want to see a grin on every face!'—Grin there is, permanent in my case, and in the evening when I wipe it off, there are white lines round my mouth where the sun has been unable to penetrate. There are ten of us on the course, and we run, pant, sweat and heave together. We are now in the middle of 'synthetic'—i.e. doing things on the ground as they will be done from the air: 'emplaning' on a plank six feet high, and springing through the replica of a D.C.3 rear door or a Wimpey dropping-hole, all in the correct position. We have got to learn to land also—feet and knees together, elbows and head well in; first contact with the ground on the soles of your feet, then the calves, then right or left buttock and a roll over to the opposite shoulder. I am quite good at it on the padded mat, not so good on the sand pit, and bloody awful from the twelve-foot plank on to the unprepared earth. However, I shall be O.K. on Sunday (the day after tomorrow) when I do my first jump, so keep your fingers crossed. On Sunday it is reveillé at 5 (*if* we are asleep), emplane at 5.45, over to the dropping ground, then out at 1,000 feet in slow pairs. 'Action stations No. 1 . . . OUT!'—'Action stations No. 2 . . . OUT!'—a leap into the slipstream, 'the fastest left turn you've ever done', a couple of seconds' mental discomfort during which you are dropping about 80 feet in all sorts of positions, and then, I take it, considerable elation as one finds oneself airborne with the beautiful, beautiful canopy wide open overhead; then silent swaying, a look at the countryside from a new angle, an impression that one is quite immobile, to be broken soon by a very real feeling that suddenly the earth has started a mad rush at you: a voice yells: 'Half turn, No. 1'; or 'Keep yer blasted legs together'; or 'Put yer elbows in, head down', etc. Then smack!—you are down on the deck, which

you probably kiss in your enthusiasm at renewing the acquaintance. It is all a barbarous pastime! I shall tell you more later and only send this screed when I have successfully completed the course: two morning jumps on Sunday, a night jump (and there is no moon) on Monday, and two more morning jumps on Tuesday.

From 10 to 11 a.m. today we did violent swinging from flying trapezes which we had to let go of at the word of command to practise falls on the various portions of the arc which simulates the swing you are liable to get on the end of your parachute when dropping from low heights—before the oscillations have ceased.

The next hour this morning was instruction in parachute manufacture and packing, a most reassuring demonstration by a first-class sergeant. Really there is nothing in the game at all!—given two essentials, (1) that the confounded thing opens, and (2) that you land without breaking your ankle, knee, ribs, collar-bone or neck. If the thing does not open, it is called 'a Roman candle' and you go for a 'Burton', which presumably is ryming slang for 'curtain'. If it does, you get one of the greatest kicks you ever had, the other one being that with which the despatcher ejects your reluctant body through that gaping aperture.

And now to lunch! My shirt is sticking to my back and streams are pouring down my sides. A twenty-five-mile drive this afternoon and a sweet bathe in the Mediterranean; then back at 5 for a cross-country run, more antics on the swings, roundabouts, and what have you.

It is an extraordinary experience, this training—that a full-grown man of my age should spend his time learning to fall down—a thing which the past experience of thirty years has been directed precisely to avoid! An even more antinatural thing is the idea of hurling yourself through the door of an aeroplane at a thousand feet! Or so it seemed to me yesterday as I was sitting at the entrance of the open door, acquiring 'air experience', i.e. peering out and watching the ground, trees, roads, railway lines and farms, and being instructed to stick out my legs, arms, head, to gain the 'feel' of the slipstream. Of course if I do qualify properly I shall have to become a sort of professional parachutist, whose functions only start once he

is on the ground—assembling one's unit, getting the arms out of the containers and attacking the first objectives. Even now, I assure you I do not look upon this training or the actual jumping as a sport (as some perverts do, I am told), but exclusively as a rather unpleasant means to an end.

## II. AFTER

I did my first two jumps at the crack of dawn this morning! I got up at 5 a.m., cup of tea, shave, flying suit, crash helmet, and to the packing shed—not far, fortunately.—Feeling fit as a fiddle and no 'sinking feeling', except when the picture of the wide-open door flashed through my mind, which I kept it from doing as much as possible. By the way, I did not have too good a night and I wish I was less of the imaginative and more of the mathematically-minded type. Picked up two 'chutes at the shed, and together with my class of ten and the instructor, a good cheerful chap called Sergeant T., we paraded for checking. Up the front of the rank and down the back he marched, adjusting a lift-web here, a quick-release box there. Then 'from the right number' (I was No. 2) and 'by your left, left turn, right wheel, em-plane!' In we got, No. 10 first, right down to the front near the pilot, Nos. 1 and 2 at the back near that vast open door that leads to nothingness. Took off, circled round—everyone pretty silent and Serge yelling, 'Come on now, lads, say "Cheese"'. Last few words, then the red light. T. crouches low in the doorway, hands on either side; green light on—'Go'—and with a pull from both arms he is out in a flash. We never saw him again until we had all alighted. The plane circles round again and this time it is up to the ten of us to get out in slow pairs. So there we were coming in over the dropping ground at a thousand feet and No. 1 in the doorway: Red lights—Action stations; green light, OUT. He is out and gone in front of my eyes, way back falling in the slipstream. I can see him as I am still in, clutching the sides of the door, the wind blowing hard on my knuckles; fields are circling by underneath with trees and houses. Waiting for 'go'—'GO!' A leap, a mad rush of air, the first clenched thought: 'My Christ, I did it, but what a fool!'—and the next: 'I knew it, I knew it, it won't open, it should have opened ten seconds ago, it won't open!'—and then: 'Ahhhh' as you feel your shoulders going up; a look upstairs and sure enough, there



she is, beautiful and white with the large blue hole in the middle, that lovely canopy!—Now I ease on to my strap, arms up, catch hold of the lift-webs, espy No. 1 floating down over there. Funny how fast he is moving when I feel stationary. I yell to him: 'Are you O.K., No. 1?' He yells back: 'O.K., and you?' and then we stop chatting. Complete confidence in my harness, but my hat, how No. 1 is travelling! I take another 'shufti' at the ground and discover that I too am speeding down—my Christ, I am! The earth's approaching, and at some pace! What's that someone is yelling? 'Elbows in, No. 2, head down; now watch it! . . . Left side landing—head in—You're O.K. now, No. 2, relax!' and crash! the deck—perfect landing on the plough, a turn to the left on my quick-release box, a sharp smack on its lid—the harness falls apart. I am up in a jiffy—'Knees bend!'—Nothing strained, broken or torn. A grand feeling to be back on Mother Earth! Round to the top of the parachute, pull in the silk, roll it up, plait the lines, pack the lot and now the worst of all: the walk back through the fields to the waiting lorries, carrying the ruddy bundle.

Quick drive back to home aerodrome, new 'chutes, emplane. This time I am No. 1 and no Instructor to go out first. 'Action Stations . . . OUT!' Out with a much mightier pull and my eyes open. I did two complete somersaults and saw ground, sky, ground from every conceivable angle. I was much better able to take stock of my feelings during the second exit, and thought that the 'chute was longer still in opening than the first time. In actual fact not more than a second and a half to two seconds goes by before you become airborne.

. . . Unable to finish this for the time being. Course successfully completed. No injuries.

*DIANA WITHERBY*

## NO BREAKING POINT

As John Stuart lay on his bed and afternoon sleep slowly fell, it seemed like a shutter separating his past from his present, and childhood became so remote as to belong to a previous life. Before he lost consciousness his mind clicked without control

to places and sensations he had forgotten, but which he recognized as echoes of other drowsy summer afternoons of his life. Dandelion parachutes floating into the sky, mauve flowers on cliff grass, white silent Mediterranean alleys, each in turn enveloped him, but with an enchantment which differed from the original as a painting differs from its subject.

He woke up to see his wife fumbling about in a drawer. She always interrupted him whenever he became free of her. No sooner did he begin to write a letter or read a book than her uneasiness would get the better of her and she would ask him questions; and never upon a trivial subject, so that even when he had answered her she had imposed upon him some anxiety which prevented him from losing himself again.

'What are you looking for?' he asked.

'Oh, darling, I am sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up. I'm looking for that policy, it must get there tomorrow.' She had picked on the one thing that was urgent and that he should have seen to himself.

'I'm going to send it off later,' he said carefully, he always felt so irritable on waking that he had an automatic careful voice which he used until he felt calmer.

'I didn't want to disturb you, and the post goes in ten minutes.'

When she left the room he stared at the photograph of her brother, Thomas, taken at the bottom of the mountain which they had climbed together, and from which Thomas had fallen hundreds of feet to die. It still seemed so extraordinary to him that she was not her brother, and that however much he imagined Thomas was going to come into the room, it was in fact always Cynthia.

During the two years of their marriage she had changed so much that now she only reminded him of Thomas physically, whereas before her manner and character had resembled his too. Where had her complacent shrewishness come from? Simply from being Mrs. Stuart instead of Miss Bourne? 'The little man at the grocer's is my *greatest* friend. We have such long conversations I have to *tear* myself away.' She did not even give him a background of maternal calm in her assurance, and the strong opinions she had developed upon everything had only a bad memory and ignorance with which to back them up. He watched her out of the window walking down the field to the pillar-box.

She must have hurried, to give him no time to send off the policy himself.

He went along the passage to talk to David, the younger brother of Cynthia, who lived with them; at least there was no family resemblance between this dark monkey-faced boy and Thomas to give him the sense of frustration he experienced with Cynthia.

Through the shut bedroom door he heard David's voice, threatening and loud. 'If you don't get into bed immediately, Foster, I shall beat you!'

'What on earth are you talking about?' said John, opening the door.

'I thought you were out', David was standing in front of the mirror, 'I have to be a dormitory captain next term—I was practising.'

'Ah—' said John, 'Well, see you later.' What was the good of talking to an adolescent. All David's strongest emotions were not experienced in his home, but at school, where he spent three-quarters of the year.

Before John was out of earshot, David, in an attempt to lend normality to his behaviour, continued his commands. 'And if you think I can't see that book, Glaton, you're very much mistaken. Hand it over!' But when the footsteps were no longer to be heard he began to dance about, scarlet in the face. 'Bloody! Bloody! Bloody!' he cried, 'Bursting in like that. I have to knock when I go into their bedroom, why don't they knock when they come into mine?'

Cynthia pushed her feet through the dark rust brambles; overhanging the path they were damp and dripping though the fields were dry. She watched her feet, large and yet stubby, and felt the twinge of despair she always suffered about her appearance, a twinge, however, which came from the centre of many different layers of feeling, aggressiveness, resignation, affection. Since her mother had died her own ugliness had contracted her spirit and also her face to a cautious sharpness, but though she could compare her looks with others and realize that she was ugly where they might be beautiful, nevertheless she recognized this fact with her mind alone. All she needed was one other person to confirm her own affection for her looks, and when John had not only unexpectedly married her but also seemed fond



of her appearance, and excitement had swept away her doubts, she had expanded and felt free. Then he had gradually become indifferent and now was almost hostile. No, he is not hostile, he loves me. Tonight the Beamishes are coming to dinner—they come in, they see what he sees in me—‘Have a drink my dears!’ They are smiling at me, we are discussing the farmer Lawrence, ‘A horrible foxy man, my dear, he looks as though feathers were sticking out of the corner of his mouth.’ ‘John, your wife becomes more penetrating every day; how do you put up with it?’ Admiring smiles—

She was back in the house and the library door was shut. John was working and she must not disturb him. He was writing an article about Thomas for a geographical magazine.

‘It is fatal making decisions when one is tired or unhappy,’ John was saying to the Beamishes, sitting pink-faced and un-subtle at the dinner table. ‘Fatigue poisons and irritates desires and makes people crave security as illness makes one crave a bed.’

‘I don’t see why security should be so unhealthy, or that needing it should only be a symptom of disease,’ said Cynthia. They never quarrelled in private, but in public, by referring to ‘people’ who did this or that, they expressed the grievances they felt against each other.

‘What people think is security when they are ill merely becomes responsibility when they are well,’ continued John.

‘But one mustn’t shirk responsibility, must one, John?’ said Mrs. Beamish, a sensitive, extremely stupid woman.

‘That wasn’t my point,’ replied John fretfully, ‘Why on earth should one create responsibility in order that one should not shirk it?’

Cynthia’s throat and mouth had become so constricted that she could neither eat nor swallow. She smiled. ‘I think that anything worth having entails a certain amount of responsibility.’

‘How’s the cricket, David?’ asked Mr. Beamish.

‘Not too bad,’ answered David. Bats, blancoed pads, oil.

‘I had the most unpleasant encounter with that farmer Lawrence, he reminds me—’ began Cynthia.

‘Responsibility!’ interrupted John, ‘What a word! Invented for the old of all ages. Support some all your life for no good reason, be a little more smug, a little less free, and say you are fulfilling responsibilities!’

Will he never stop? Usually inarticulate he is hysterical when his words begin to flow, all the accumulated bits of his emotions pour out unsorted. He is telling me he hates me and in front of the Beamishes. In front of the Beamishes. He does not love me.

She smiled again. 'Oh John, surely you are exaggerating. You can't expect to skim the cream off everything.'

He ignored her. 'When one is climbing a mountain or in tremendous physical danger one does not feel responsible to anyone. The moment after one might have been killed not only leaves one shaking and exhilarated in one's body but also one's mind. One has done enough. And of course if one has shared that experience with another man, as well as the simple straightforward side of it all, and he dies' John's stare became glassy 'he can never be replaced.'

The Beamishes began to prick with embarrassment. They knew how the death of Thomas had shattered John, they felt great sympathy for him, but they did not expect him to talk about it. Grief and sympathy were emotions one implied, a word or a silence here and there, but John had gone far enough, and by threatening to enlarge on his sorrow was going to remind them of their own chasms of unhappiness which they spent most of their lives trying not to think about.

'And when that other person has gone it almost seems as though one has lost the experience because they alone shared it,' said Cynthia in a solemn, wistful voice.

She had swung the focus on to herself. John looked at her with a pang of pity. After all Thomas was her brother, he did not want to upset her by reminding her of his death. So much of their marriage was based on that loss and it remained as a mutual emotion between them which was not criticized and which had some dignity.

Cynthia did not allow the silence to become too uncomfortable. 'We have an advance copy of John's book about the High Pamirs for you,' she continued in the same solemn way; a pause, then with more animation, 'They arrived yesterday, it was most exciting.'

'What sort of book-jacket are you having?' asked Mrs. Beamish. Safely back on the ladder! They descended rung by rung and John scarcely spoke at all.

Later on in the bedroom he continued to be silent, but Cynthia

was arguing in her mind with such intensity as to be almost unaware that no words were being spoken.

'I got so depressed at dinner,' she said eventually.

'Did you?' he answered, 'Why?'

'It was so awful the way you said in front of them that I was such a responsibility to you.' The sentence, repeated in her imagination the whole evening sounded unnatural, like one of an actress too quick on a cue.

'I didn't say that. I was discussing responsibility in the abstract.'

'You weren't, you were talking about me.'

'It wasn't you in particular I was thinking of. Though perhaps I am a person who oughtn't to have anyone to look after.'

'You surely don't think you look after me do you? I have to do everything, both for you and myself.'

He did not answer, and his shut mouth exasperated her as it was obviously intended to be a criticism of her remark. Doubtful herself as to the truth of it she continued in a louder voice.

'Everything! There are only about two things in the day I ask you to do, and in the end I always have to do them myself.' As she spoke she took off her stocking and she saw him look at her short thick leg, and then look away quickly, but it was not a deliberate insult, merely an unconscious one. An intense misery made her hysterical.

'If only mother hadn't died she'd have told you what she thought of you! She'd have told you—' her voice cracked.

'Now Cynthia—darling—what are you talking about? Don't be upset, I'm not as bad as all that! It was that silly woman Hilda Beamish who annoyed me. She made out that time should be spent doing things one doesn't want to, just so that one shouldn't be called a shirker.'

'And don't you want to spend your time with me?'

'But I wasn't talking about spending my time with you, I was talking about Hilda Beamish!'

In spite of the fact that his outburst at dinner had represented a crisis he was determined not to go on with it now, he was too tired. All he wanted to do was to take off his clothes and get into bed. She watched him undress and saw that his argument with her was an accompaniment of his actions, instead of his actions being automatic while his mind ought to have been



overcome by her sadness. At the back of her mind was a memory of the grey, churning hangover she would suffer if she abandoned herself to hysteria, and she controlled herself. He was so quickly asleep that her feeling of injury did not even have time to die down before it was again stimulated by his indifference.

' . . . John must find us such dull cowardly people, against his own amazing standards of courage,' Cynthia was reading the letter before she had drunk any coffee and the day seemed insurmountable, 'but we would love to see you again, so please . . .'

David, always in high spirits at breakfast, burst into giggles over a letter that he was reading, written in a tiny irregular handwriting.

'What does Toby say?' asked Cynthia.

'Oh nothing much. He's in Switzerland.' David immediately assumed a dead-pan expression.

'So I noticed from the stamp, is he enjoying it?'

'I think so,' answered David casually. Why should everyone poke into who was writing to him and where they were writing from?

'You must have him to stay again,' said Cynthia. It really is impossible to take an interest in David's life, he rebuffs any friendly question. Her mind and emotions became clearer and she wondered how she could have made such a fuss the night before, and regretted having felt released and defiant for a few hours, because it had made her say too much. Darling John how stupid he must have thought me, how hysterical. He comes in, 'I say, I am so sorry darling please forgive me'—'I didn't mean what I said about not looking after you darling. I shall look after you for ever'—'Why should you? Why should anyone look after anyone else?' 'It is wonderful of you to say that, not many women would, all the same I *shall* look after you.'

Upstairs John was dressing, having deliberately remained half asleep until she was out of the room. He looked out of the window and saw that the sky behind the tree outside was a purple black from recent rain, but a momentary sun shone on the front of the tree so that each leaf, twig and bough was radiant and glittering on one side and dark on the other. There was no movement and no sound except for an occasional dripping, each drop seeming to fall slowly, lit by the sun against the cloud. His mind, which had become more heavy-lidded as each year went

by, was suddenly pierced, and he felt a mixture of exhilaration and peace, and in the last degree melancholy and isolation. A moment of excitement forced on him by an external beauty which stimulated a desire for creativeness—what could it do except make his path of perpetual retreat more bitter?

He went into the dining-room where Cynthia was sitting alone. She waited until he had drunk some coffee.

'I'm afraid I was ghastly last night darling,' she said. 'Do forgive me, I can't think what I was talking about.'

'Oh, what does it matter?' he answered. He looked so detached and uninterested that she felt the slavish desperation of those in love who can make no impression on the beloved. In fact he did feel a serene superiority which lingered from having been moved by the beauty of the tree, and was temporarily contemptuous of petty half-hearted emotions. But it did not last long. Soon he felt the worries and impulses, which he must give way to rather than analyse, pressing at him.

'I think I shall go to London tomorrow,' he announced after long silence.

'Tomorrow! Why?' asked Cynthia in a terrified voice. It *had* been a crisis, he was going away!

'Well, now that the book is out I think I ought to get a job.'

'A job! What sort of job?'

'I haven't yet decided, but it shouldn't be difficult. I was offered several after I rowed for Cambridge.'

Cynthia laughed. 'Were you? What sort of jobs are you qualified for if you can row?'

'They often offer jobs to the rowing blues,' he replied stiffly.

'Of course, darling,' she said quickly, 'of course. A very good idea if they want the right sort of people. And anyway you're the sort of person who could do any job well; but I don't understand why you are so anxious to get one. Only last night you were talking about unnecessary responsibilities, and here you're plunging straight into them! Besides an office job would keep you up so, you'd be indoors all the time.'

'And what else can I do with myself?'

'But, John, why go to London? Why not do something you'd like? An out-of-door job like farming?'

He had thought of the possibility of farming. He would like it, but he wasn't going to do it. 'No, I shall go and see Glitneys,

the beer racketeers, they offered me a job when I came down from Cambridge.' He smiled.

'But why this sudden decision? And you can't go up to London every day from here.'

He looked away with a guilty but obstinate expression. 'If I settle anything I thought I'd come down every weekend, and perhaps take a room somewhere in London.'

'Oh, you can't do that. I'll come up and we'll find a flat somewhere.'

He did not answer. For a few months she had everything she had wanted, and now it seemed that she was again back on her own resources. She was reminded of an autumn day long ago in her childhood when she had been lost, though she was not far away from her home. Suddenly she had seen a figure in the distance, someone to ask her way from. Across the long ploughed field in the cold sun to the silhouette, but when she reached it she found that it was only a scarecrow. She had felt the same chilly pang as she felt now when she had stood by the scarecrow and heard nothing except the flapping of its clothes and some distant rooks cawing; she was still lost and there was no one except herself to find her way for her.

'That'll be fine! When I've settled on something we'll look for a flat!' Too hearty, too late! How she hated him at that moment for not loving her as she loved him.

A fortnight had gone by and still he had not returned. She went through all the suffering of unequal love where pain is the constant emotion, happiness the rare visitor who arrives only just in time to turn the trickling sands before hurrying away. If he telephoned her heart jumped, he was coming back tomorrow. No he wasn't, but it would all be settled soon, he would be down in a few days, he was having dinner tonight with some Cambridge friends. A sleepless night wondering if he would get drunk, make love to anyone, go to bed with someone. If he didn't telephone, the ghastly propping open of all the doors in case she should miss the bell. Sometimes a morning of tough independence—here I am safely married; dear John, I do love him, but I could get along quite well without him, anyway I don't have to, so why worry? Followed by the small hours of the afternoon with no emotions but a languid background of discomfort; followed by the evening when everything became

excited and doubled as though her own body was chained, but an astral body followed him about, in and out of parties into restaurants where he was dining with other women.

There was no second sight about her suspicions, she could not confirm them, and the fact that they happened to be correct made no difference to her state of mind.

He had hovered and made no decisions, there were two jobs he could have taken, and instead of 'thinking it over' he had spent his days thinking of nothing at all. Immediately he had arrived in London he had got in touch with his most sociable friends and had met with them a girl called Jennie, whom he found attractive. The second night they met again and she had gone home with him, and after that they had been looked upon as a couple by their mutual friends who, though in private were rather pompous about the affair and told each other it was 'a bit thick, after all what about Cynthia', nevertheless made everything as easy as possible for John to continue, and encouraged him in what they called his disloyalty.

Jennie was married but her husband had been in India for eighteen months. She had not been unfaithful to him before, and confessed to John that it was not so much that she wanted to make love to him that had made her suddenly go off with him, but that she was beginning to feel a curious dry frustration in having no one upon whom to shower affection. Was her marriage a happy one? Yes, it was, he had no idea what a profound happiness there was in a happy marriage. His wife sounded very hard person though.

It seemed to him strange that given a certain set of stimuli, in his case a girl whom it was possible to love and idealize, emotions could be let loose that he had always imagined were unique. When he lay in Jennie's arms it seemed to happen automatically that he should want to protect her, never to leave her, and to experience intense comfort and happiness. It was as though it was all waiting in him to fix on to somebody, and it worried him that though the details were different he had felt it all before. The emotion he felt for Jennie could not be described as deep, but was that not just because they had only known each other for a few days? Were not deep, as opposed to violent, feelings merely dependent upon length of time? But even with her he felt the slight contempt and boredom that he always suffered



after he had been to bed with someone. He did not like to see her washing her face or fiddling with her hair; he became satiated with her company and always went to his club or visited bachelor friends.

Then, one evening at the end of a fortnight, which in a way was so brief and yet had developed a routine of its own, he went to telephone Cynthia. As usual he felt guilty and hostile when she answered in a casual voice through which he could detect hysteria.

'Hullo, darling, however many more interviews are you going to have?'

'Only one more, tomorrow.'

'Will you be back the day after?'

'Well, I'm not sure, not absolutely sure, but I should think so.'

'You see, darling, I've got some exciting news for you. We're going to have a baby! I thought we might celebrate.'

'A baby!' A baby! Good God! It seemed as though the whole of his loose unanalysed thoughts, his put-off decisions, had suddenly crystallized into a sword pointing at his throat.

'Isn't it wonderful? I'm not feeling too good at the moment, but it'll pass off,' already her voice had a self-important quality of maternity.

'Aren't you pleased? After all—' her voice began to wobble.

'Oh yes, my dear, it makes the job even more important now though, doesn't it?'

'Well I must go now,' she said, 'goodbye.' She hung up. I'm not going to argue and force him to say he's pleased, I'm not. She burst into tears and walked about the house muttering with self pity. I was so excited, he's ruined it all, he only had to be pleased, he's ruined it.

The effect of her abrupt ringing off was what she hoped it would be, he was horrified at his brutality. He went back to Jennie waiting at the table to order dinner.

'I've done something terrible,' he said, 'Cynthia told me she was going to have a baby—a baby—I was so flabbergasted that instead of sounding pleased I'm afraid I sounded horrified. I think she was rather upset.'

'Upset, I should think so,' replied Jennie, 'Fancy her having to tell you that over the telephone! Fancy you not being there to know. Poor thing.' She sounded almost as reproachful as Cynthia.

'Damn it, darling, I would be there if I wasn't here with you.'

'I'm not stopping you going back. I think you ought to ring her up again now, anyway.'

'I'm going to order my food and have something to drink first.' He ordered several drinks because he had decided that he wanted to get drunk.

'You're very lucky,' said Jennie, 'Peter and I long to have a baby, but we thought we'd better wait.'

He looked at her. 'I suppose all these natural events have enough impetus to make them bearable if two people are in love with each other.'

'It is your own fault,' she said, 'marriage is a serious thing, and if you don't take it seriously and just marry someone for inadequate reasons, how can you expect it to be bearable?'

'I find it bearable already, that is what I complain of. And I don't know what adequate reasons are for marriage.'

'Well, I don't understand why you complain. If marriage is bearable to you why doesn't that include having a child?'

'I suppose it is because it knocks into the ground any day-dreams I have of being able to escape one day,' he answered. As he became gradually drunk he became more disgusted and melancholy. There was nothing for it, he would get a safe job, until the end of his days he could not escape. It was Cynthia's fault. He would take the least congenial of the two jobs, it was all her bloody fault. As always when he drank he began to think of Thomas. He has found that far from time healing this wound it had increased it, because the agony was just as sharp, and added to it was the bitterness that time was slipping away as well. He would never feel again about anyone, any damn woman, what he had felt about Thomas. Who could compare in looks with Thomas? Cynthia resembled him, but her hair was mouse where his had been golden, her eyes were hazel where his had been blue, his character had been balanced between imagination and simplicity whereas hers was not balanced at all.

'Now don't look so depressed,' said Jennie. 'What's on your mind?'

Nothing in particular.' He would never discuss Thomas with anyone, never. Why was that moment when Thomas had stood adjusting his rope, with his hair falling over his face, continually in his mind when other things were forgotten? It seemed

that instead of time moving with him steadily along an unpredicted course, occasionally he had the illusion that he was moving and time was stationary; furthermore that he too sometimes became stationary inside a moment, not necessarily a critical one, and was consequently overwhelmed with its vividness, suffering simultaneously from its quality of eternity because it seemed always to have been there, and its infinitesimal quality because the whole past, present and future seemed always to have been there as well. Whenever he thought of Thomas and himself climbing the mountain, that moment came back to him, containing all his love for Thomas, standing masculine, narrow-hipped, his spatulate fingers round the rope, and all the physical pleasure of the continual climb nearer to the sky, rare and silent, and further from the earth, which emphasized his mortality.

'I think you ought to go and telephone again.'

'Ah, yes.' He picked his way through the restaurant, concentrating drunkenly as he did so. Round this table, mustn't run into this old man—I loved him and he's dead, I loved him.

'Is that you, Cynthia, darling? I just rang back, there was such a noise here before I couldn't talk properly,' he suddenly felt warm and enthusiastic, 'it's terribly exciting about the baby, when did you know?'

'I wasn't sure, but I've begun being sick . . .' she prattled on about her symptoms.

'I'll be there the day after tomorrow definitely. I've decided on the Glitneys job. It'll be rather monotonous at first, I shall have to tour the provinces. But it may lead to better things.'

'Well that's all to the good isn't it,' she had been uncertain about his taking a job because she had thought that he was going away for ever. But now she was relieved. 'What's John going to do now he's finished his book?' 'He's got a job in Glitneys, the beer people, pretty boring, my dear, but one must live, mustn't one? We're taking a little house in London.'

John was so tired when he rejoined Jennie that he realized what he meant by deep feelings; Cynthia, whom he did not really love, seemed, nevertheless, a part of his life, whereas Jennie sitting there was not a part of his life at all, and now that he was exhausted he did not think about her, but found that he was wondering about Cynthia's sickness.

'You have been a long time,' she said crossly.

'It was your idea to telephone her again,' he replied, 'I couldn't be any quicker than I was without being brusque.'

'I know, but it's rather embarrassing sitting for hours by oneself in a restaurant, especially as a man over there has been trying to get off with me.'

He was unmoved by her remark, she enjoyed men staring at her so why pretend to be so squeamish about it? She began to talk of her husband, and the evening ended with a fractious insistence on the part of both of them in talking about their respective husband and wife, each irritated by the other doing so, but each admitting to themselves that they were tied to someone else.

Nine months later John raced from their little house in Kensington to the nursing home. He had been telephoning all day from his office and now the news had come through—a boy. When he arrived, agitated; at the home, he asked a nurse how Cynthia was, and was told that she had had an easy time. He crept into her room, to find her extremely pale, but happy and almost dignified.

'It wasn't too bad, was it, darling, they told me you'd had an easy time?'

'It was absolutely ghastly,' she said with a great effort, but smiling, 'I don't know what they call a difficult time. But it's wonderful now it's over. Have you seen him?'

'Well, no, I haven't.'

'I'll ring for a nurse.'

A few minutes later a nurse came into the room with the baby wrapped up and almost invisible. He looked anxiously at its face. 'Why,' he said after a pause, 'it's exactly like Thomas.' He was overcome with a mixture of emotions.

'That's exactly what I thought!' she stretched out her arms for the baby. 'It's got his wonderful eyelashes.' She was still drugged and remembered a voice in her childhood. 'Fancy Thomas having those long eyelashes, quite wasted on a little boy, aren't they, Cynthia?'

John peered over the bed. He found it hard to see any eyelashes at all on the tiny face, though he could see some tears on the cheeks.

How extraordinary to think that he will go to school,' he said, 'and to a university.' Amused, they began to discuss which school he would go to.



'Poor little thing,' she said, bending over the baby and kissing him; 'were we planning his little future for him when he's only a few hours old.' But she continued to talk about the merits of various public schools in a serious way.

At last John got up to leave. 'It's very annoying,' he said. 'But I've got to go to Glasgow tomorrow, I couldn't persuade them to send anyone else.'

'Oh dear!' she answered, 'what a bore. I was so hoping you wouldn't be going away.' Even through all her excitement and sense of fulfilment about the baby she felt an anxious twinge that he would meet some girl in Glasgow.

'I'm furious about it,' he said, and indeed he was rather annoyed at having to trail all the way to Glasgow. Nearly always when he went away he was unfaithful to her, but there was no affection, there had not been another Jennie, yet.

He kissed her, and went over to the door.

'Of course we'll call it Thomas,' he said. 'How I wish he could see his nephew!'

'Of course we'll call him Thomas,' she answered, but in her heart she would have preferred another name.

When he had gone she kissed the baby, 'Were you going to be a successful little baby man, were you, darling?' she said.

## JACK LINDSAY

# THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES

A REPLY TO DWIGHT MACDONALD

IN his essay in the November number of *HORIZON* Dwight Macdonald neatly pigeon-holes most of the main intellectual reactions from the present world-developments. But he does not seem to see how he himself falls into some of the categories that he disdains. That of the ex-Marxists, for instance, 'disillusioned' by 1917, or that of the Machiavellians who debunk the progressive hope. For his own line of thought is conditioned by that 'disillusion' and by the need to undermine what has actually been achieved of Socialism. That he has his own little private

solution makes him a trifle better, but still leaves him sick with the usual intellectualist malaise. There is hope, he does claim, in Marxian Socialism; but as he scorns the one great concrete effort made to actualize Marxian Socialism, he is left only with his own isolated intellectual pontificality and the modest request for 'new working-class organizations, new radical parties, a reshaping of Marxian doctrine—all three on a less exclusively working-class basis', yet carrying the 'philosophy of the under-dog' to 'revolutionary extremes'.

The vitiated Marxism which underlies this type of thinking is made clear at length by Dwight Macdonald himself. He visualizes two possibilities in the present historical situation. 'The development of the forces of production is pushing the world in a collectivist direction,' which can be either socialist or capitalist. He makes much play with this term 'collectivist', and all the confused thinking in his position resides in this sleight-of-mind. What is valid in his dictum is no more than the good old perception of monopoly-trends in finance and industrial organization. But if his thesis is to stand it must imply considerably more than that. It must imply that the capitalist integration we call imperialism is capable of much more expansion and finally of stabilization. It must imply that Nazism is truly a kind of Socialism, a kind of Collectivism. That is a claim which Goebbels would gladly acknowledge but which is surely the worst kind of mystification, misuse of terms.

Dwight Macdonald asserts: 'From the transition from bourgeois private capitalism to bureaucratic collectivism which is taking place *without socialist intervention* throughout the world, we must conclude that once capitalism has reached a certain stage of decay it will not automatically be succeeded by Socialism, but that if the working-class is unable to resolve the crisis *its way*, the bourgeoisie will resolve it *its way*: through the milder forms of State intervention at first, through Fascism ultimately and their own elimination as a ruling class.' But what Marxist of any importance whatever has claimed, since the days of Lenin at least, that the transition to Socialism could come about automatically?; and what peculiar concept lies behind the statement that Fascism means the elimination of the bourgeoisie as a ruling class? (Fascism, of course, means the concentration of power in fewer hands among the bourgeoisie; but that is a different matter.)

This is not a side issue. It is basic to the understanding of what vitiates Dwight Macdonald's thesis. It is necessary for his ultimate equation of Nazism and Stalinism. That is, he has to drop his Marxism and retreat to a subjective interpretation of history, essentially on the lines of, say, Bertrand Russell with his theory of power-urge, power-ethics. For, since the economic and social bases of Hitlerian Germany and Stalinist Russia are so totally different, only by a regression to ethical concepts unrelated to history, to economic structure, can the necessary blackguarding of the Soviets be achieved.

The sly jump is not hard to make out. 'Collectivism' in Russia is obviously stable and capable of a continuous progression; and by abstracting 'collectivism' from historical fact, Dwight Macdonald is able to convey without direct statement that his alternative, Fascist 'bureaucratic collectivism', is also a possibly stable condition. The mechanist outlook is manifest when we turn from theory to the world outside us. Has this trend of 'bureaucratic collectivism' shown any signs of stability within the capitalist world? On the contrary has it not shown itself in the countries where it has come to a head as hopelessly unstable? That its first phases in England and U.S.A. could ultimately work out any other way is unlikely on any grounds of factual analogy or theoretical analysis. One does not mean, of course, that there is any question or possibility of a painless or automatic transition to Socialism. But the forms and conditions of struggle leading into the classless society are vastly complex and various, according to the phase of development and the tradition of each country concerned.

This note is not intended as a claim that Soviet Russia has at every point of its development produced results which in themselves are to be praised and set up for imitation. The results have been praiseworthy and imitation-worthy in the sense that they have shown us a liberated people struggling with the situation in which they actually find themselves, struggling with history. But in that sense only. The enormous masses of illiterate peasants, etc., who had to be drawn rapidly into Socialism—at a tempo dictated by the external war-pressures—inevitably made for phases of extreme crudity and triumphant 'bureaucracy'. But the economic basis, the collective ownership, provided the dynamism for as inevitable an overcoming of these limitations.

Under such conditions fixation in 'bureaucratic collectivism' or whatever power-bogey one likes to invent is impossible.

Behind such theses as that of Dwight Macdonald or of Trotskyites in general lies this un-Marxist refusal to link effects with basic economic conditions. And as part of that refusal there is an egoist inflation, a contempt of the masses. For if the masses have achieved the revolution and become the slaves and dupes of a bureaucratic overlordship, then they are certainly contemptible. (This contempt does not exclude, of course, a mysticism of the masses, especially a mysticism of an hypostasized proletariat, which is always about to be, but never is—the revolutionary world-proletariat of Trotsky or the desiderated new party of Dwight Macdonald: fantasy-reflections of the repelled or rejected revolutionary.) These attitudes naturally appeal to the declassed intellectual, who suffers from an enlarged sense of his own unacknowledged importance, an inability to work from the level of things as they are, people as they are.

That this hostile attitude to 'Stalinism' is coagulating among intellectuals just at the point where Russia is emerging from the pressures mainly responsible for the crudifying effects, is unfortunate but to be expected. It is surely the duty of every responsible intellectual to fight this trend, to work on concrete lines for that 'broader sense of human fraternity and democratic rights' which Dwight Macdonald rightly wants to see. But dissidents like Macdonald uphold the banner of pure proletarianism when the concrete issue is one of broadening the progressive front; and they raise the Liberal slogans when the concrete issue narrows to one of more explicit working-class struggle and support of the Soviet Union.

## SELECTED NOTICE

### SALVATION THROUGH ART

*Education through Art.* By Herbert Read. 320 pp., 4 colour plates and 56 half-tone plates. Faber & Faber. 25s. net.

THE blurb states that Herbert Read considers this his most important book; and he may be right. Indeed the kernel of it is a discussion of one of the most important problems facing civilization—how to produce men and women who are both harmonious in character and creative in spirit. It will be as well to approach its fundamental thesis by first mentioning and tossing to one side some of the more superficial impressions the book is likely to make on the reader.



At first sight then, one's attention is attracted to the numerous plates. These all illustrate children's paintings, and are beautifully produced, in some cases in colour. By this time most people are likely to have seen a fair number of the products of 'modern' art teaching, and the original enthusiastic claims that they have great æsthetic value have worn a little thin. Some of the drawings here seem to hanker after beauty without achieving it; more have the charm which comes doing one's best without the slightest consciousness of one's limitations in technique, knowledge or feeling. Herbert Read, in fact, lays no great stress of the æsthetic worth of the pictures, when judged by adult standards. The most immediately noticeable thing he does about them is to attach to each one a diagnosis: 'extrovert intuitive type=rhythmical pattern' and so on.

Turning to the letterpress of the book, one finds that a great deal of it is taken up with an elaborate discussion of the various 'typologies' which have been suggested by, in the main, German psychologists. We are plunged into a maelstrom of Jung, Jænsch, Kretschmer, Worringer, Bullough, Löwenfeld and others; and that is only the beginning, because we soon come across Freud and the psychoanalysts, Köhler and the Gestalt school, and Pavlov and the behaviourists. With the aid of copious quotations, Read attempts to show that all these warring sects of psychologists have really been saying the same thing, and he sets up equations between Jung's introverts and extroverts, Kretschmer's schizothymes and cyclothymes, and the various other types. Finally, he states that each type expresses itself in a particular form of visual art: 'realism=thinking, superrealism=feeling, expressionism=sensation, constructivism=intuition' (p. 97).

Now about all this there are several things to be said. A book arguing a case about the methods of education is hardly the most suitable vehicle for an attempted synthesis of the numerous schools of psychology which are at present in the field; and the links with which Read joins them are sometimes very flimsy. Thus it does not really bring the teaching of a sociologist like Burrow into very close connection with that of a behaviourist like Pavlov to suggest that 'Burrow's analysis is at no point inconsistent with the physiological facts as represented by an empiricist like Pavlov—the bi-dimensional or theoretical illusion which we normally substitute for the organic wholeness of our common life being but an elaborate structure of conditioned reflexes.' Incidentally, this sentence is a fair example of the style in which a great deal of the book is written. The going is even stickier in the paragraphs quoted from some of Read's authorities.

One's progress is also dogged by doubts whether all these gentlemen knew what they were trying to say. Jung probably had something in his distinction between introverts and extroverts but he admitted that 'it is not easy to characterize this contrasting relationship to the object in a way that is lucid and intelligible'; and in the reviewer's experience it has been difficult to find two people who could convince one that they were using the words in the same sense. Again, Kretschmer was probably after some genuine correlation between bodily build and psychological type—though he obviously had no sympathy whatever with schizothymes, and was never able to think of anything at all to say about his 'athletic' type, whom most of his followers in consequence tend to

forget. It is, however, symptomatic of a profound fact that his description of the types strikes one as being exactly what one would expect from a Bavarian burgher. The types as they are described by their various proponents, and the diagnostic characters by which we attempt to recognise them, are expressions of the way certain potentialities develop within a given cultural framework. Even within this framework, it may be suggested that far more careful work is required before one can plausibly put forward correlations between psychological type and particular schools of painting, of the kind Read advances; and a more general view which embraced the individuals, and their artistic modes of creation, in widely different cultures would render such correlations even less straightforward.

The reason why Read devotes so much space to the discussion and diagnosis of psychological type is that he wishes to show that children's artistic creations are individual acts expressive of their personalities. This point could, I think, have been made clear without the elaborate and shaky apparatus of erudition on which Read has based it. One would, in fact, have been ready to concede it more or less *a priori*. It would have been more interesting to have had some discussion of the limitations of individuation in children's paintings. Is it purely chance that three paintings by different pupils of the Hall School, Weybridge (Plates 40, 41, 42) all have the same 'strong rhythmical pattern = extrovert intuitive type'; or is this a phenomenon akin to the formation of a 'school'? Again, there is no mention in Read's discussion of the difficulty children must find in discovering a technique by which their conceptions can be delineated. By neglecting these social and intellectual aspects of the child's world, Read seems to me to give a one-sided, a too Wordsworthian, picture of the actual situation.

This is, indeed, one of the two fundamental criticisms I should like to make of Read's argument. For the central point of his thesis is that a child's paintings, being an expression of his whole personality, provide a mechanism by which he can attain (or retain?) a state of psychical equilibrium. 'Psychic equilibrium, which is the basis of all equableness and intellectual integration, is only possible when this integration of the unconscious is allowed or encouraged to take place, which it notably does in all forms of imaginative activity—daydreaming, spontaneous elaborations of fantasy, creative expression in colour, line, sounds and words.' (p. 193). My criticism is that Read is assuming that one of the possible mechanisms of integration is in itself not merely a mechanism but a drive, capable of bringing about the desired harmony. I should like to set against Read's advocacy a quotation from the American anthropologist Margaret Mead (from *And keep your Powder Dry*<sup>1</sup>, p. 103).

'With this habit of mind deeply ingrained, American parents send their children to school, to nursery school or kindergarten or first grade, to measure up and to be measured against their contemporaries. "How does John compare with the other children, Miss Jones?" That is the question, not: "Has my child the tongue of a poet, or the eye of a painter, or the voice of a leader?" Not that, unless of course it is a very special kind of school for the children of intellectuals, and then although the question may be put as: "How is John's finger painting, Miss Jones?" it usually means, "How

<sup>1</sup> Morrow, New York, 1942



does my John compare with the Allingham's Willy, who they are always saying shows such artistic promise?" Marks! Marks!"

That passage indicates that there is a problem in modern education more profound than any that can be solved by the devotion of a greater amount of time to 'art'.

That does not mean, of course, that the nature of the curriculum is unimportant. Read is certainly on the side of the living when he insists on the necessity for school activities to be creative and imaginative. But to my mind he weakens his case when he allows this demand to lead him into placing an overwhelming emphasis on painting and drawing. And this emphasis is supported only by a confusion of thought. Read bases his case for education through creative activity on statements, perhaps justifiable but somewhat vague, such as: 'I maintain that life itself, in its most secret and essential sources, is æsthetic—that it only *is* in virtue of the embodiment of energy in a form which is not merely material, but æsthetic.' (p.35). He goes on to define Art as 'mankind's effort to achieve integration with the basic forms of the physical universe and the organic rhythms of life.' (p.110). Now this gives to 'Art' and to 'æsthetics' an extremely wide meaning, a meaning in which painting is only one small incident. In some passages, Read recognizes this. He says (p. 212) 'From this point of view the æsthetic principle enters into mathematics and history, into science itself'. It would indeed be flabbergasting to find science, the objective study of the natural world, regarded as not qualifying as a part of 'mankind's effort to achieve integration with the basic forms of the physical universe and the organic rhythms of life.' But in fact, that is what Read implies, except in the few odd asides such as that quoted above. The general tenor of the book is in the spirit of 'the æsthetic mode of experience is always opposed to the intellectual mode of experience' (p. 105); and although immediately after that Read calls, in half a sentence, for an 'integration of these two modes of experience', he gives no hint of how that is to be brought about; and his practical proposals are all for an intense concentration on art in the narrow sense of the overtly and conventionally artistic activities which is not the sense on which his case is founded.

I should willingly exchange many pages of discussion of somewhat dubious psychological classifications for quite a few paragraphs on how schoolwork (maths., geography, science, yes—but also painting itself) can be presented to children in such a way as to encourage their creativity and imagination. For this is, within the framework of our culture, one of the key problems. And Read is pre-eminently a man, one of the not-too-many, who can recognize creativeness when he sees it. In fact, he knows what the problem is. And it is because he knows that, that his book, in spite of what may seem the plethora of particular criticisms I have aimed at it, remains a very important and in some ways illuminating one.

C. H. WADDINGTON

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